

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE CENTRAL DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Christopher Bunker, et al. v. Joseph Buccinio, et al.

Bunker v. Buccinio · No. 2:23-cv-09263-FLA (DFM) · Decided October 24, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Central District of California accepted a magistrate judge’s Report and Recommendation concerning Plaintiffs’ motion for leave to file a Fourth Amended Complaint. The court held that Younger abstention applied because the related state probate action was pending when the federal action was filed, implicated important state interests, and provided an adequate forum for Plaintiffs’ claims. The court denied the motion for leave to amend.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Central District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Fernando L. Aenlle-Rocha
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Central District of California
DECIDED	October 24, 2025
DOCKET	2:23-cv-09263-FLA (DFM)
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiffs objected to a magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation recommending denial of leave to file a Fourth Amended Complaint. The district court conducted de novo review and accepted the Report and Recommendation.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	De novo review of the objections to the magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation under 28 U.S.C. § 636.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court order; precedential status unknown
PARTIES	Christopher Bunker, et al. v. Joseph Buccinio, et al.

TOPICS

- motion to amend
- probate procedure
- probate
- section 1983
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Younger abstention applied even though the state probate proceeding had been stayed or was dormant when the federal court considered the case.
2. Whether the state probate proceeding implicated important state interests sufficient to satisfy the Younger abstention requirements.
3. Whether the California Superior Court presiding over the probate proceeding provided an adequate forum for plaintiffs' federal claims.
4. Whether plaintiffs should be granted leave to file a Fourth Amended Complaint when the proposed complaint was barred by Younger abstention and failed to state a claim for relief.

HOLDINGS

1. A state proceeding satisfies the ongoing-proceeding requirement for Younger abstention when it was pending at the time the federal suit was filed; it is irrelevant that the state proceeding was later stayed to permit the federal suit to proceed.
2. The Probate Action implicated important state interests because California has an important interest in enforcing the orders and judgments of its courts without federal interference; plaintiffs' allegations of fraud challenged the state-court process by which those judgments were obtained.
3. The California Superior Court presiding over the probate proceeding provided an adequate forum for plaintiffs' federal claims, satisfying the fourth Younger requirement.
4. Leave to file the proposed Fourth Amended Complaint was denied because the proposed pleading was barred by Younger abstention and plaintiffs conceded that it failed to state a claim for relief.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"It is irrelevant that the state ... action was stayed ... to allow the federal suit to proceed." (at 1)

"Because the Probate Action was pending in state court at the time Plaintiffs' federal suit was filed, the first Younger requirement is met." (at 1)

"Because the Probate Action implicates an important state interest in enforcing the orders and judgments issued by its courts without federal interference, the second and third Younger requirements are met." (at 2)

"Because Plaintiffs have an adequate forum in state court, the fourth Younger requirement is met." (at 3)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiffs sought to challenge matters connected to a pending California probate proceeding styled Estate of Richard Bochicchio, Case No. PROSB2201534, in the San Bernardino County Superior Court. They characterized the probate action as dormant or held in abeyance while the federal case proceeded and alleged that private actors had committed fraud on the state court. They also argued that the state probate proceeding

could not provide an adequate forum for their federal civil-rights claims because the state court purportedly had limited jurisdiction.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiffs moved for leave to file a Fourth Amended Complaint. The assigned magistrate judge recommended denying the motion because the proposed complaint was barred by Younger abstention and failed to state a claim for relief. Plaintiffs conceded that the proposed complaint failed to state a claim but objected to the Younger analysis. The district court overruled the objections, accepted the Report and Recommendation, and denied leave to amend.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Younger v. Harris, 401 U.S. 37 (1971)
- San Remo Hotel v. City and County of San Francisco, 145 F.3d 1095, 1104 (9th Cir. 1998)
- Pennzoil Co. v. Texaco, Inc., 481 U.S. 1, 14 (1987)
- Prostitis v. Riverside Superior Family Court, 2020 WL 3843727, at *10 (C.D. Cal. Apr. 15, 2020)
- Steffel v. Thompson, 415 U.S. 452, 460 (1974)
- In re Michael R., 137 Cal. App. 4th 126, 131 n. 1 (2006)
- Estate of Kraus, 184 Cal. App. 4th 103, 114 (2010)