

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF OREGON

**Robert L. Emery, Jr. v. Oregon Department of Corrections (ODOC),
an Agency of the State of Oregon; Oregon Corrections Enterprises
(OCE), an Agency of the State of Oregon; Mr. Castanon, OCE
Production Manager; Mr. Poppell, OCE Production Manager; Lori
Hensel, OCE General Manager**

Robert L. Emery, Jr. v. Oregon Department of Corrections (ODOC), Oregon Corrections Enterprises (OCE), et al., No. 2:24-cv-01847-MC (D. Or. Mar. 20, 2026) · No. 2:24-cv-01847-MC · Decided March 20, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of Oregon granted defendants’ motion for summary judgment in an action brought by Robert L. Emery, Jr., an adult in custody, alleging violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act, and the Equal Protection Clause. The court held that Emery was not otherwise qualified to perform the TRCI laundry position with his requested wheelchair accommodation and that the reassignment was rationally related to legitimate safety and productivity interests.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Oregon
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Michael J. McShane
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Oregon
DECIDED	March 20, 2026
DOCKET	2:24-cv-01847-MC
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendants moved for summary judgment on the plaintiff's ADA, Rehabilitation Act, and Fourteenth Amendment equal protection claims.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Summary judgment is appropriate when there is no genuine dispute as to any material fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. The court construes evidence and reasonable inferences in favor of the nonmoving party but does not weigh evidence or determine credibility.

TOPICS

summary judgment

ada / disability

equal protection

prisoners rights

fourteenth amendment

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights

disability discrimination

prisoner litigation

employment and labor

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Plaintiff was otherwise qualified to perform the essential functions of the prison laundry position with or without the requested wheelchair accommodation under the ADA and Rehabilitation Act.
2. Whether prohibiting Plaintiff from performing the laundry position in a wheelchair constituted intentional disability discrimination under the ADA or Rehabilitation Act.
3. Whether reassigning Plaintiff from the laundry position violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

HOLDINGS

1. Plaintiff was not otherwise qualified for the laundry position because he could not perform its essential standing requirements and failed to show that use of a wheelchair was a reasonable accommodation that would enable him to perform those requirements.
2. Plaintiff failed to establish intentional discrimination under the ADA or Rehabilitation Act because he was not denied the benefits of the prison's work programs and produced no evidence that Defendants acted with deliberate indifference to a federally protected right.
3. The reassignment did not violate the Equal Protection Clause because disability classifications receive rational-basis review, and the safety and productivity concerns supporting the wheelchair restriction were rationally related to legitimate correctional interests.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Because Plaintiff fails to show that he was otherwise qualified to perform the job in the TRCI laundry or that Defendants intentionally discriminated against him, Defendants’ motion is GRANTED.”

“The ADA “requires only ‘reasonable modifications’ that would not fundamentally alter the nature of the service provided, and only when the individual seeking modification is otherwise eligible for the service.””

“These reasons survive rational basis scrutiny, and summary judgment is granted on Plaintiff’s equal protection claim.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff, an adult in custody at Two Rivers Correctional Institution, has nerve damage in both feet that causes pain and prevents him from standing for long periods. He applied for and was assigned to work in the institution's industrial laundry, whose essential duties included standing for extended periods and lifting forty to fifty pounds in a fast-moving facility containing heavy laundry carts. After Plaintiff reported to work in a wheelchair, prison officials informed him that the laundry position could not be performed in a wheelchair and reassigned him. The court found that Plaintiff could perform other prison work assignments and produced no persuasive evidence that the reassignment was discriminatory or that wheelchair use was a reasonable accommodation for the laundry position.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff filed suit on November 5, 2024, alleging that prison officials discriminated against him and denied him equal protection by reassigning him from a prison laundry position because he needed to use a wheelchair. Defendants moved for summary judgment. The district court granted the motion and dismissed the action with prejudice.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317, 323 (1986)
- Matsushita Electric Industrial Co. v. Zenith Radio Corp., 475 U.S. 574, 587 (1986)
- Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc., 477 U.S. 242, 249, 255 (1986)
- Balint v. Carson City, 180 F.3d 1047, 1054 (9th Cir. 1999)
- Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007)
- Walker v. Beard, 789 F.3d 1125, 1133 (9th Cir. 2015)
- Epling v. Komathy, No. CV 10-5862-GAF (RNB), 2011 WL 13142131 (C.D. Cal. Dec. 5, 2011)
- Pennsylvania Department of Corrections v. Yeskey, 524 U.S. 206, 210 (1998)
- McGary v. City of Portland, 386 F.3d 1259, 1265 (9th Cir. 2004)
- Zukle v. Regents of the University of California, 166 F.3d 1041, 1045 n.11 (9th Cir. 1999)
- Duvall v. County of Kitsap, 260 F.3d 1124, 1138-39 (9th Cir. 2001)
- Pierce v. County of Orange, 526 F.3d 1190, 1216-17 (9th Cir. 2008)
- Tennessee v. Lane, 541 U.S. 509, 532 (2004)
- Jenkins v. Roberts, No. 2:25-CV-00295-SB, 2025 WL 2817638, at *6 (D. Or. Oct. 3, 2025)
- City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Center, 473 U.S. 432, 439-41 (1985)
- Poe by and through Poe v. Labrador, 709 F. Supp. 3d 1169, 1190 (D. Idaho 2023)
- Payan v. Los Angeles Community College District, 11 F.4th 729, 737 (9th Cir. 2021)
- Vignolo v. Miller, 120 F.3d 1075, 1077 (9th Cir. 1997)

