

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF
VIRGINIA, ROANOKE DIVISION

Darren Lamont Rice v. Dir. Chadwick Dotson et al.

Rice v. Dotson · No. 7:25-cv-00234 · Decided May 28, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Western District of Virginia dismissed Darren Lamont Rice’s federal claims arising from alleged inadequate medical treatment, supervisory inaction, disclosure of medical information, and other conduct at Wallens Ridge State Prison. The court granted motions to dismiss filed by Chadwick Dotson, Benny Mullins, and Luciano D’Amato, dismissed additional claims under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, and declined supplemental jurisdiction over Rice’s state-law claims.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Western District of Virginia, Roanoke Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Jasmine H. Yoon
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Western District of Virginia, Roanoke Division
DECIDED	May 28, 2026
DOCKET	7:25-cv-00234
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Prisoner civil-rights action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 before the court on motions to dismiss filed by Dotson, Mullins, and D’Amato, with additional federal claims subject to screening under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	On a Rule 12(b)(6) motion, the court tests the legal sufficiency of the complaint, accepts well-pleaded factual allegations as true, construes pro se pleadings liberally, and determines whether the complaint states a plausible claim for relief. Legal conclusions and bare assertions without factual enhancement are not accepted as true.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished federal district court memorandum opinion; nonprecedential
PARTIES	Darren Lamont Rice v. Dir. Chadwick Dotson, Benny Mullins, Luciano D’Amato, D. Davis, Unnamed Quality Health Services

TOPICS

motions to dismiss

section 1983

prisoners rights

cruel and unusual punishment

hipaa

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights

constitutional law

prisoner litigation

civil procedure

health law

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Rice's second amended complaint stated plausible official-capacity claims under § 1983.
2. Whether Rice adequately pleaded equal-protection, life-and-liberty, and right-to-travel claims.
3. Whether Rice adequately pleaded Eighth Amendment deliberate-indifference claims against the medical and correctional defendants.
4. Whether Rice could bring a private claim under HIPAA for disclosure of medical information.
5. Whether Rice adequately pleaded supervisory liability against Dotson.
6. Whether the court should exercise supplemental jurisdiction over Rice's state-law claims after dismissing the federal claims.

HOLDINGS

1. Rice failed to state official-capacity claims because he did not identify an express policy, final policymaker decision, deliberately indifferent omission, or sufficiently persistent and widespread custom causing his alleged constitutional injuries.
2. Rice failed to state plausible equal-protection, life-and-liberty, or right-to-travel claims.
3. Rice failed to state deliberate-indifference claims against D'Amato and Nauss.
4. Rice failed to state a deliberate-indifference claim against Mullins based on treatment decisions, refusal to provide preferred specialist care, medication decisions, or alleged negligence.
5. Rice's HIPAA claim failed as a matter of law because HIPAA does not provide a private right of action.
6. Rice failed to state a supervisory-liability claim against Dotson.
7. Rice failed to state plausible constitutional claims against Townsend, Davis, Caughron, Hall, or the Quality Health Office Holder.
8. The court declined to exercise supplemental jurisdiction over Rice's state-law claims after dismissing all federal claims.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"To survive a motion to dismiss under Rule 12(b)(6), a complaint must "state[] a plausible claim for relief" that "permit[s] the court to infer more than the mere possibility of misconduct."

“The Constitution does not provide a right to specific medication or preferred treatment”

“Medical malpractice does not become a constitutional violation merely because the victim is a prisoner.”

“The statute does not . . . provide a private right of action for any citizen.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Rice was incarcerated at Wallens Ridge State Prison when he underwent hernia surgery performed by physician Luciano D’Amato in June 2023. He alleged postoperative complications, a fentanyl overdose, delayed specialist treatment, continuing pain and liver-related problems, and inadequate medical responses by several medical and correctional personnel. He also alleged disclosure of medical information, interference with prison-related matters, threats, missing mail, and attempts to force him into general population. The court concluded that the pleaded facts did not plausibly establish deliberate indifference, supervisory liability, equal-protection violations, a right-to-travel violation, a HIPAA private claim, or other constitutional claims.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Rice filed an initial complaint concerning medical treatment following hernia surgery. After the court granted opportunities to clarify and amend, Rice filed an amended complaint and then a second amended complaint, which became the operative pleading. The court granted the motions to dismiss, dismissed the federal claims against the remaining defendants under § 1915A, and declined supplemental jurisdiction over the state-law claims.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- In re Birmingham, 846 F.3d 88, 92 (4th Cir. 2017)
- Randall v. United States, 30 F.3d 518, 522 (4th Cir. 1994)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 676, 678–79 (2009)
- Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555–56 (2007)
- Nemet Chevrolet, Ltd. v. Consumeraffairs.com, Inc., 591 F.3d 250, 255 (4th Cir. 2009)
- King v. Rubenstein, 825 F.3d 206, 214 (4th Cir. 2016)
- Beaudett v. City of Hampton, 775 F.2d 1274, 1278 (4th Cir. 1985)
- Jackson v. Lightsey, 775 F.3d 170, 178 (4th Cir. 2014)
- Will v. Mich. Dep’t of State Police, 491 U.S. 58, 71 (1989)
- Riddick v. Watson, 503 F. Supp. 3d 399, 414–16 (E.D. Va. 2020)
- Lytle v. Doyle, 326 F.3d 463, 471, 473 (4th Cir. 2003)
- Carter v. Morris, 164 F.3d 215, 217 (4th Cir. 1999)
- Allen v. Good, No. 7:22-cv-00351, 2023 WL 5984287, at *6 (W.D. Va. Sept. 14, 2023)

- *Morrison v. Garraghty*, 239 F.3d 648, 654 (4th Cir. 2001)
- *Dale v. Hammonds*, No. 3:22-cv-00642, 2023 WL 3081302, at *3 (W.D.N.C. Apr. 25, 2023)
- *Williams v. Wisconsin*, 336 F.3d 576, 581 (7th Cir. 2003)
- *Meachum v. Fano*, 427 U.S. 215, 224–25 (1976)
- *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 106 (1976)
- *Gordon v. Schilling*, 937 F.3d 348, 356 (4th Cir. 2019)
- *DePaola v. Clarke*, 884 F.3d 481, 486 (4th Cir. 2018)
- *Gregory v. Prison Health Servs., Inc.*, 247 F. App'x 433, 434 (4th Cir. 2007) (per curiam)
- *Miltier v. Beorn*, *Miltier v. Beorn*, 896 F.2d 848, 851 (4th Cir. 1990)
- *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 837–38, 844 (1994)
- *Farabee v. Gardella*, 131 F.4th 185, 194 (4th Cir. 2025)
- *Jackson v. Sampson*, 536 F. App'x 356, 357 (4th Cir. 2013) (per curiam)
- *Russell v. Sheffer*, 528 F.2d 318, 319 (4th Cir. 1975)
- *Shields v. Kunkel*, 442 F.2d 409 (9th Cir. 1971)
- *Maddox v. Johnson*, No. 7:09-cv-00179, 2010 WL 8750307, at *4 (W.D. Va. July 30, 2010)
- *Burkey v. Balt. Cnty.*, No. GJH-20-2006, 2021 WL 3857814, at *11 (D. Md. Aug. 30, 2021)
- *Mallory v. Dorchester Cnty. Det. Ctr.*, No. 2:23-cv-01688, 2024 WL 2159789, at *8 (D.S.C. Apr. 24, 2024)
- *Van Higgins v. Miller*, No. 1:12-cv-00297, 2012 WL 4511524, at *2 (W.D.N.C. Oct. 1, 2012)
- *Shaw v. Stroud*, 13 F.3d 791, 799 (4th Cir. 1994)
- *Wilkins v. Montgomery*, 751 F.3d 214, 226 (4th Cir. 2014)
- *Carter v. Ely*, No. 7:20-cv-00713, 2022 WL 801585, at *4 (W.D. Va. Mar. 15, 2022)
- *Plascencia v. Turnquist*, No. 8:24-cv-00145, 2024 WL 3064039, at *5 (C.D. Cal. Feb. 2, 2024)
- *Mills v. Clarke*, No. 1:20-cv-00498, 2023 WL 3063287, at *6 (E.D. Cal. Apr. 14, 2023)
- *Wilson v. McKeller*, 254 F. App'x 960, 961 (4th Cir. 2007) (per curiam)
- *Northington v. Jackson*, 973 F.2d 1518, 1524 (10th Cir. 1992)
- *Wilkins v. Rasnake*, No. 7:24-cv-00093, 2025 WL 974108, at *7 (W.D. Va. Mar. 31, 2025)
- *Cole v. Holloway*, 631 F. App'x 185, 186 (4th Cir. 2016)