

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Tommie Lee Jackson v. Rick Hill, et al.

Jackson v. Hill · No. 2:24-cv-3180-JDP (P) · Decided March 6, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California dismissed Tommie Lee Jackson’s pro se civil-rights complaint concerning alleged exposure to COVID-19 while incarcerated. The court held that the complaint failed to state claims under the Fifth, Fourteenth, and Eighth Amendments, including failure-to-protect and inadequate-medical-care theories. The court granted in forma pauperis status and dismissed the complaint with leave to amend within thirty days.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Jeremy D. Peterson
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	March 6, 2025
DOCKET	2:24-cv-3180-JDP (P)
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Prisoner civil-rights complaint screened under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e); complaint dismissed for failure to state a claim, with leave to amend.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court screened the in forma pauperis complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e), accepting well-pleaded allegations for screening purposes, construing the pro se pleading liberally, and determining whether the complaint stated a plausible claim for relief under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8(a)(2).
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished
PARTIES	Tommie Lee Jackson v. Rick Hill, Tracy Johnson, Joseph Tuggle

TOPICS

- section 1983
- prisoners rights
- civil rights
- due process
- cruel and unusual punishment

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the complaint stated a cognizable Fifth Amendment due-process claim against a state-prison official.
2. Whether the complaint stated a Fourteenth Amendment procedural or substantive due-process claim.
3. Whether the complaint stated an Eighth Amendment failure-to-protect claim based on COVID-19 exposure.
4. Whether the complaint stated an Eighth Amendment inadequate-medical-care claim.
5. Whether the complaint adequately alleged each named defendant's personal involvement in the asserted constitutional violations.

HOLDINGS

1. A civil-rights complaint fails to state a claim against defendants when it does not allege specific facts connecting each defendant to the alleged wrongdoing. Jackson failed to state a claim against Johnson and Tuggle because he made no allegations connecting either defendant to the alleged violations.
2. The Fifth Amendment Due Process Clause does not apply to alleged conduct by state prison officials because it restricts the federal government, while state conduct is governed by the Fourteenth Amendment.
3. Jackson failed to state a Fourteenth Amendment due-process claim because he did not identify a constitutionally protected liberty or property interest or explain what process he was denied.
4. An Eighth Amendment failure-to-protect claim requires allegations that the conditions posed a substantial risk of serious harm and that the defendant was deliberately indifferent by subjectively recognizing the risk and failing to take reasonable measures. Jackson did not adequately allege deliberate indifference by Hill.
5. An Eighth Amendment inadequate-medical-care claim requires a sufficiently serious medical need and deliberate indifference, including a purposeful act or failure to respond to pain or a possible medical need and harm caused by that indifference. Jackson did not sufficiently allege that Hill deliberately disregarded his medical needs.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“A federal court must screen the complaint of any claimant seeking permission to proceed in forma pauperis.” (at 1)

“A complaint must contain a short and plain statement that plaintiff is entitled to relief” (at 1)

“There is no question that COVID-19 poses a substantial risk of serious harm to inmates.” (at 3)

“Plaintiff’s allegations hinge on the complaint that he contracted COVID-19, but his allegations fail to sufficiently explain how Hill failed to take reasonable measures to prevent such risk.” (at 4)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Jackson alleged that a warden moved him into a unit with twelve elderly, at-risk inmates apparently to prevent COVID-19 infection. About three weeks later, Jackson contracted COVID-19 and was moved to a unit with other infected inmates, where he remained ill. He alleged that COVID-19 protocols were not followed and that prison officials deliberately disregarded his health, but the complaint and exhibits connected the alleged conduct primarily to Rick Hill and did not connect Tracy Johnson or Joseph Tuggle to any wrongdoing.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff, a former state inmate proceeding pro se, filed a complaint alleging that prison wardens violated his Fifth, Eighth, and Fourteenth Amendment rights in connection with his exposure to COVID-19. The court granted leave to proceed in forma pauperis, screened the complaint, found that it failed to state a claim, dismissed it with leave to amend, and allowed thirty days to file an amended complaint or a notice of voluntary dismissal.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678-79 (2009)
- Kobold v. Good Samaritan Regional Medical Center, 832 F.3d 1024, 1038 (9th Cir. 2016)
- Nagrampa v. MailCoups, Inc., 469 F.3d 1257, 1264 n.2 (9th Cir. 2006) (en banc)
- Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972) (per curiam)
- Hayes v. Idaho Correctional Center, 849 F.3d 1204, 1208 (9th Cir. 2017)
- Bruns v. National Credit Union Administration, 122 F.3d 1251, 1257 (9th Cir. 1997)
- Ivey v. Board of Regents, 673 F.2d 266, 268 (9th Cir. 1982)
- Martinez v. Virga, No. 2:11-cv-0942-KJN (P), 2011 WL 1807442, at *2 (E.D. Cal. May 10, 2011)
- Castillo v. McFadden, 399 F.3d 993, 1002 n.5 (9th Cir. 2005)
- O'Con v. Katavich, No. 1:13-cv-1321-AWI-SKO, 2013 WL 6185212, at *6 (E.D. Cal. Nov. 26, 2013)
- Board of Regents of State Colleges v. Roth, 408 U.S. 564, 569 (1972)
- Shinault v. Hawks, 782 F.3d 1053, 1057 (9th Cir. 2015)
- Reno v. Flores, 507 U.S. 292, 302 (1993)
- Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 834, 847 (1994)
- Plata v. Newsom, 445 F. Supp. 3d 557, 559 (N.D. Cal. 2020)
- Lemire v. California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation, 726 F.3d 1062, 1081 (9th Cir. 2013)
- Jett v. Penner, 439 F.3d 1091, 1096 (9th Cir. 2006)
- Lacey v. Maricopa County, 693 F.3d 896, 907 n.1 (9th Cir. 2012) (en banc)

