

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF
MICHIGAN, SOUTHERN DIVISION

Aulton Daniel Goben, III v. Kent County et al.

Case No. 1:25-cv-1477 (W.D. Mich. Dec. 9, 2025) · No. 1:25-cv-1477 · Decided December 9, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Western District of Michigan dismisses, at the Prison Litigation Reform Act screening stage, a state prisoner's 42 U.S.C. § 1983 action against Kent County and Kent County Sheriff Michelle LaJoye-Young. The court concludes that the complaint fails to allege a policy or custom causing the constitutional violations and does not establish the named defendants' personal involvement in misconduct attributed to nonparty jail employees.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Western District of Michigan, Southern Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Sally J. Berens
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Western District of Michigan, Southern Division
DECIDED	December 9, 2025
DOCKET	1:25-cv-1477
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	A state prisoner brought a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 action against Kent County and Kent County Sheriff Michelle LaJoye-Young. After granting leave to proceed in forma pauperis, the court conducted mandatory preliminary screening under the Prison Litigation Reform Act before service of process and dismissed the complaint for failure to state a claim.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	On preliminary PLRA screening, the court assessed whether the complaint was frivolous, malicious, failed to state a claim upon which relief could be granted, or sought monetary relief from an immune defendant. The court applied the Rule 8 and Twombly/Iqbal facial-plausibility standard, accepted factual allegations as true unless clearly irrational or wholly incredible, and read the pro se complaint indulgently.

PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished, nonprecedential district-court opinion
PARTIES	Aulton Daniel Goben, III v. Kent County, Michelle LaJoye-Young

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the complaint stated a § 1983 claim against Kent County based on an alleged jail policy allowing upper- and lower-deck inmates to be out of their cells simultaneously during cleanup.
2. Whether Kent County or Sheriff Michelle LaJoye-Young could be held liable for alleged constitutional misconduct committed by jail employees who were not named as defendants.
3. Whether the complaint should be dismissed on preliminary review under the PLRA for failure to state a claim.

HOLDINGS

1. The complaint failed to state a municipal-liability claim because it did not identify a policy or custom of Kent County that caused jail employees to act with deliberate indifference to the risk that Plaintiff would be assaulted.
2. The named defendants could not be held liable for alleged constitutional violations committed by nonparty jail employees absent allegations that the named defendants were personally involved in the misconduct or that the misconduct resulted from a qualifying municipal policy or custom.
3. The complaint was subject to dismissal for failure to state a claim under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b), and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c).

KEY QUOTATIONS

“An individual or entity named as a defendant is not obliged to engage in litigation unless notified of the action, and brought under a court’s authority, by formal process.” (PageID.2)

“Service of process, under longstanding tradition in our system of justice, is fundamental to any procedural imposition on a named defendant.” (PageID.2)

“A “policy” includes a “policy statement, ordinance, regulation, or decision officially adopted and promulgated” by the sheriff.” (PageID.5)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff was incarcerated at the Kent County Correctional Facility and alleged that a policy allowing upper- and lower-deck inmates to be out of their cells simultaneously during cleanup contributed to assaults against him on October 31, 2024, and December 23, 2024. He alleged that he suffered a crushed nose, was later returned to maximum-security housing despite safety concerns, and underwent surgery in July 2025. He also alleged misconduct by several nonparty deputies and medical personnel, including failure to intervene in an assault, delayed medical attention, retaliation, and failure to respond after he swallowed broken pencils. The only named individual defendant, Sheriff Michelle LaJoye-Young, was sued in her personal and official capacities.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff filed a prisoner civil-rights complaint seeking damages and injunctive and declaratory relief. He consented to proceed before a United States Magistrate Judge under 28 U.S.C. § 636(c), but the named defendants had not yet been served. On preliminary PLRA review, the court dismissed the complaint under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b) and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c).

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- In re Prison Litigation Reform Act, 105 F.3d 1131, 1131, 1134 (6th Cir. 1997)
- Murphy Bros., Inc. v. Michetti Pipe Stringing, Inc., 526 U.S. 344, 347, 350-51 (1999)
- Conway v. Fayette County Government, 212 F. App'x 418 (6th Cir. 2007)
- Neals v. Norwood, 59 F.3d 530, 532 (5th Cir. 1995)
- Coleman v. Labor & Industry Review Commission of Wisconsin, 860 F.3d 461, 471 (7th Cir. 2017)
- Williams v. King, 875 F.3d 500, 503-04 (9th Cir. 2017)
- Burton v. Schamp, 25 F.4th 198, 207 n.26 (3d Cir. 2022)
- Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972)
- Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25, 33 (1992)
- Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555, 570 (2007)
- Conley v. Gibson, 355 U.S. 41, 47 (1957)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 676, 678-79 (2009)
- Hill v. Lappin, 630 F.3d 468, 470-71 (6th Cir. 2010)
- West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988)
- Street v. Corrections Corporation of America, 102 F.3d 810, 814 (6th Cir. 1996)
- Albright v. Oliver, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994)
- Monell v. Department of Social Services, 436 U.S. 658, 690-91, 694 (1978)
- Everson v. Leis, 556 F.3d 484, 495 (6th Cir. 2009)
- Los Angeles County v. Humphries, 562 U.S. 29, 35-37 (2010)
- Lipman v. Budish, 974 F.3d 726, 747 (6th Cir. 2020)

- Doe v. Claiborne County, 103 F.3d 495, 508-09 (6th Cir. 1996)
- Gebser v. Lago Vista Independent School District, 524 U.S. 274 (1998)
- Phillips v. Anderson County Board of Education, Case No. 3:06-CV-35, 2006 WL 3759893 (E.D. Tenn. Dec. 19, 2006)
- Craig v. Lima City School Board of Education, 384 F. Supp. 2d 1136 (N.D. Ohio 2005)
- McMillian v. Monroe County, 520 U.S. 781, 784-85 (1997)
- Kroes v. Smith, 540 F. Supp. 1295, 1298 (E.D. Mich. 1982)
- McGore v. Wrigglesworth, 114 F.3d 601, 604-05, 610-11 (6th Cir. 1997)
- Coppedge v. United States, 369 U.S. 438, 445 (1962)

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