

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

Young v. County of Alameda

Case No. 24-cv-03914-PCP · No. 24-cv-03914-PCP · Decided April 28, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of California dismisses Walter Lee Young’s pro se Section 1983 complaint. The court grants leave to amend claims concerning an alleged sexual assault and strip search, requiring factual allegations, exhaustion information, and identification of proper defendants. Claims concerning privileges allegedly denied in violation of the Babu v. Ahern consent decree are dismissed without leave to amend in this action, without prejudice to pursuing them through the consent decree’s procedures.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	P. Casey Pitts
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
DECIDED	April 28, 2025
DOCKET	24-cv-03914-PCP
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Pro se prisoner civil-rights action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 screened under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, the court must identify cognizable claims and dismiss claims that are frivolous, malicious, fail to state a claim, or seek monetary relief from an immune defendant. Pro se pleadings are liberally construed.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unpublished district court order; precedential status unknown
PARTIES	Walter Lee Young v. County of Alameda, Gregory Ahern, Inmate Ishmal

TOPICS

- section 1983
- prisoners rights
- civil rights
- pleadings
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights

prisoner litigation

constitutional law

municipal liability

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Young's allegations concerning a sexual assault and strip search stated cognizable § 1983 claims when the complaint lacked facts describing the conduct, did not establish exhaustion, and did not identify proper defendants.
2. Whether Young could pursue claims concerning denied jail privileges in this separate action when those claims alleged violations of the consent decree entered in the Babu class action.
3. Whether the complaint adequately stated claims against Alameda County, Sheriff Gregory Ahern, and fellow inmate Ishmal under § 1983.

HOLDINGS

1. The allegations did not state cognizable claims because Young failed to plead facts identifying who harmed him, when the harm occurred, and the nature and circumstances of the alleged conduct; he also failed to adequately address exhaustion and proper defendants.
2. The constitutional analysis for the alleged sexual assault and strip search would depend on whether Young was a convicted inmate or a pretrial detainee: the Eighth Amendment would apply to a convicted inmate, while the Fourteenth Amendment Due Process Clause would apply to a pretrial detainee.
3. To proceed against Alameda County, Young must identify a constitutional policy or practice that was the moving force behind the alleged violation and must support an alleged custom or practice with evidence creating a triable issue of fact; a single incident is insufficient to establish Monell liability.
4. Sheriff Ahern could not be held liable merely because he was a supervisor or allegedly knew about constitutional violations; Young had to identify Ahern's own actions that directly caused the alleged injury.
5. A private fellow inmate is not a proper § 1983 defendant unless the plaintiff alleges that the inmate acted under color of state law.
6. The claims concerning privileges allegedly denied in violation of the Babu consent decree had to be pursued through class counsel using the procedures established by that decree and were dismissed without leave to amend in this action, without prejudice to pursuing them through the decree's procedures.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“if Mr. Young believes the strip search constituted a sexual assault, he must explain what actions the officers took that were beyond the scope of a normal search.” (at 15-20)

“Exhaustion in prisoner cases covered by § 1997e(a) is mandatory.” (at 13-18)

“a single incident of unconstitutional activity is not sufficient to impose liability under Monell.” (at 9-13)

“Under no circumstances is there liability under section 1983 on the theory that one is responsible for the actions or omissions of another.” (at 15-19)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Young, an inmate at Santa Rita Jail, alleged that he had been sexually assaulted, subjected to an illegal strip search, and denied privileges because of his mental-health diagnosis. His complaint and attached materials did not provide facts describing the alleged assault or strip search, and the materials did not show exhaustion of the jail grievance process. The privileges claims substantially overlapped with claims covered by the Babu v. Ahern class action and its consent decree, which required class members to use class counsel and the decree's dispute-resolution procedures.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Walter Lee Young, an inmate at Santa Rita Jail, filed a pro se § 1983 complaint against Alameda County, Sheriff Gregory Ahern, and fellow inmate Ishmal. The court screened the complaint, found no cognizable claim as pleaded, dismissed the sexual-assault and strip-search claims with leave to amend, and dismissed the claims concerning privileges allegedly denied under the Babu consent decree without leave to amend in this action. The court allowed Young until June 6, 2025, to file a first amended complaint.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

No remand. Young may file a first amended complaint by June 6, 2025, using the caption and civil case number specified in the order, and must plead facts supporting each claim. Failure to amend timely may result in dismissal.

CASES CITED

- Babu v. Ahern, 18-cv-07677-NC (N.D. Cal.)
- Balistreri v. Pacifica Police Department, 901 F.2d 696, 699 (9th Cir. 1990)
- Bearchild v. Cobban, 947 F.3d 1130, 1144-45 (9th Cir. 2020)
- Bell v. Wolfish, 441 U.S. 520, 535 n.16 (1979)
- Porter v. Nussle, 534 U.S. 516, 524 (2002)
- Ross v. Blake, 578 U.S. 632, 638-39 (2016)
- Booth v. Churner, 532 U.S. 731, 741 (2001)
- Woodford v. Ngo, 548 U.S. 81, 84 (2006)
- Oviatt By and Through Waugh v. Pearce, 954 F.2d 1470, 1474 (9th Cir. 1992)
- Monell v. Department of Social Services of City of New York, 436 U.S. 658 (1978)
- Gordon v. Orange County, 6 F.4th 961, 974 (9th Cir. 2021)

- Oklahoma City v. Tuttle, 471 U.S. 808, 823-24 (1985)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 677 (2009)
- Taylor v. List, 880 F.2d 1040, 1045 (9th Cir. 1989)
- Hydrick v. Hunter, 669 F.3d 937, 942 (9th Cir. 2012)
- West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988)
- London v. Coopers & Lybrand, 644 F.2d 811, 814 (9th Cir. 1981)
- Ferdik v. Bonzelet, 963 F.2d 1258, 1262-63 (9th Cir. 1992)

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