

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

E.J. McElroy v. Guzman

No. 1:25-cv-00748 GSA (PC) · No. No. 1:25-cv-00748 GSA (PC) · Decided June 26, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California recommends denying E.J. McElroy’s application to proceed in forma pauperis under the Prison Litigation Reform Act’s three-strikes provision, 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g). The court finds that McElroy had previously accrued at least three qualifying strikes and did not adequately allege imminent danger of serious physical injury when he filed the action. The court also recommends that he pay the filing fee in full before proceeding and gives him fourteen days to file objections.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Gary S. Austin
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	June 26, 2025
DOCKET	No. 1:25-cv-00748 GSA (PC)
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	A state prisoner proceeding pro se filed a civil-rights complaint under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and an application to proceed in forma pauperis. The magistrate judge issued findings and recommendations that the application be denied under the Prison Litigation Reform Act’s three-strikes provision and that Plaintiff be required to pay the filing fee before proceeding.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court applied 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g), reviewing the prior dismissals and the allegations in the complaint to determine whether Plaintiff had three strikes and qualified for the imminent-danger exception.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential

TOPICS

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

PRACTICE AREAS

Prisoner civil rights

Federal civil procedure

In forma pauperis proceedings

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Plaintiff had accrued three or more qualifying strikes under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).
2. Whether Plaintiff qualified for the imminent-danger exception to the three-strikes bar.
3. Whether Plaintiff's application to proceed in forma pauperis should be denied and Plaintiff required to pay the filing fee before proceeding.

HOLDINGS

1. Plaintiff was a three-strikes litigant because prior actions had been dismissed on grounds qualifying as strikes under § 1915(g).
2. Plaintiff did not qualify for the imminent-danger exception because the complaint did not allege that he faced imminent danger of serious physical injury when it was filed.
3. Plaintiff should be required to pay the filing fee in full before proceeding further with the action.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“In no event shall a prisoner bring a civil action or appeal a judgment in a civil action or proceeding under this section if the prisoner has, on 3 or more prior occasions, while incarcerated or detained in any facility, brought an action or appeal in a court of the United States that was dismissed on the grounds that it is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, unless the prisoner is under imminent danger of serious physical injury.” (at 2)

““Imminent danger of serious physical injury must be a real and present threat, not merely speculative or hypothetical.”” (at 3)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff, a state prisoner, filed a § 1983 complaint that appeared to allege violations related to the failure to address disabilities. He submitted a completed application to proceed in forma pauperis. The court took judicial notice of prior actions dismissed for failure to state a claim, frivolousness, or related grounds, concluding that Plaintiff had at least three strikes. The complaint did not allege facts showing imminent danger of serious physical injury at the time of filing.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff filed the complaint and an application to proceed in forma pauperis on June 20, 2025, followed by his six-month prison trust-account statement on June 24, 2025. The magistrate judge concluded that Plaintiff had previously accrued at least three qualifying strikes and had not shown that he was in imminent danger of serious physical injury when he filed the complaint. The matter was referred to the magistrate judge under 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(B), and Plaintiff was given fourteen days to object; the recommendation remained subject to review by the assigned district judge.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Rodriguez v. Cook, 169 F.3d 1176, 1180 (9th Cir. 1999)
- Smart v. Heinze, 347 F.2d 114, 116 (9th Cir. 1965)
- Keeton v. Marshall, No. CV 17-01213 FMO (KS), 2018 WL 4381543, at *6 (C.D. Cal. June 8, 2018)
- Owens v. Matthews, No. CV 16-07755 JFW (KS), 2017 WL 603183, at *2 (C.D. Cal. Jan. 6, 2017)
- Weller v. Dickson, 314 F.2d 598 (9th Cir. 1963)
- Shobe v. People of State of California, 362 F.2d 545, 546 (9th Cir. 1966)
- Knapp v. Hogan, 738 F.3d 1106, 1109 (9th Cir. 2013)
- Andrews v. King, 398 F.3d 1113, 1121 (9th Cir. 2006)
- O'Neal v. Price, 531 F.3d 1146, 1153 (9th Cir. 2008)
- Harris v. Mangum, 863 F.3d 1133, 1142-43 (9th Cir. 2017)
- Andrews v. Cervantes, 493 F.3d 1047, 1053 (9th Cir. 2007)
- Abdul-Akbar v. McKelvie, 239 F.3d 307, 312-14 (3d Cir. 2001)
- Medberry v. Butler, 185 F.3d 1189, 1192-93 (11th Cir. 1999)
- Ashley v. Dilworth, 147 F.3d 715, 717 (8th Cir. 1998)
- Banos v. O'Guin, 144 F.3d 883, 885 (5th Cir. 1998)
- Lipsey v. Allison, No. 1:21-cv-00912 GSA, 2021 WL 2390424, at *3 (E.D. Cal. June 11, 2021)
- Blackman v. Mjening, No. 1:16-cv-01421 LJO GSA, 2016 WL 5815905, at *1 (E.D. Cal. Oct. 4, 2016)
- Ray v. Lara, 31 F.4th 692, 695 (9th Cir. 2022)
- Wilkerson v. Wheeler, 772 F.3d 834, 839 (9th Cir. 2014)
- Martinez v. Ylst, 951 F.2d 1153 (9th Cir. 1991)

OPINION

(PC) Mcelroy v. Guzman

PER CURIAM.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

9 FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

10 11 E.J. MCELROY, No. 1:25-cv-00748 GSA (PC) 12 Plaintiff, ORDER AND FINDINGS
AND

RECOMMENDATIONS

13 v. ORDER RECOMMENDING: 14 ,

(1) PLAINTIFF'S APPLICATION TO

15 Defendants. PROCEED IN FORMA PAUPERIS BE

DENIED CONSISTENT WITH 28 U.S.C. §
16 1915(G)
17 (ECF No. 2), AND
18 (2) PLAINTIFF BE REQUIRED TO PAY THE
FILING FEE IN FULL PRIOR TO
19 PROCEEDING ANY FURTHER WITH THIS
ACTION

20
PLAINTIFF'S OBJECTIONS DUE IN
21 FOURTEEN DAYS

22 23 Plaintiff, a state prisoner proceeding pro se, seeks relief pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and 24
has requested authority pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915 to proceed in forma pauperis. ECF Nos. 1,
25 2, 6. The matter was referred to a United States Magistrate Judge pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 26
636(b)(1)(B) and Local Rule 302. 27 For the reasons stated below, the undersigned will
recommend that Plaintiff's application 28 to proceed in forma pauperis be denied, consistent with
28 U.S.C. § 1915(g), and that he be 1 required to pay the filing fee in full prior to proceeding any
further with this action. Plaintiff will 2 be given fourteen days to file objections to this order.

3 I. RELEVANT FACTS

4 On June 20, 2025, Plaintiff's complaint and his application to proceed in forma pauperis 5 were
docketed. ECF Nos. 1, 2. Shortly thereafter, on June 24, 2025, Plaintiff's six-month prison 6 trust
fund account statement was docketed. ECF No. 6. Thus, Plaintiff's application to proceed 7 in
forma pauperis is complete.

8 II. IN FORMA PAUPERIS STATUS

9 "[In forma pauperis] status is not a constitutional right." *Rodriguez v. Cook*, 169 F.3d 10 1176,
1180 (9th Cir. 1999) (brackets added); *Smart v. Heinze*, 347 F.2d 114, 116 (9th Cir. 1965) 11 ("To
proceed in forma pauperis is a privilege not a right."). An inmate's in forma pauperis status 12
may be revoked at any time if the court, either sua sponte or on a motion, determines that the 13
status was improvidently granted. *Keeton v. Marshall*, No. CV 17-01213 FMO (KS), 2018 WL 14
4381543, at *6 (C.D. Cal. June 8, 2018) (citation omitted) (italics added); *Owens v. Matthews*, 15
No. CV 16-07755 JFW (KS), 2017 WL 603183, at *2 (C.D. Cal. Jan. 6, 2017) (stating same). 16
The grant or refusal of permission to proceed in forma pauperis is left to the sound discretion of 17
the district court. *Smart*, 347 F.2d 114, 116 (9th Cir. 1963) (citing *Weller v. Dickson*, 314 F.2d 18
598 (9th Cir. 1963)). The latitude given a district court in such matters is especially broad in civil
19 actions by prisoners against their wardens and other officials. *Smart*, 347 F.2d at 116 (footnote
20 citation omitted); *Shobe v. People of State of California*, 362 F.2d 545, 546 (9th Cir. 1966)
(citing 21 *Smart*).

22 III. THREE STRIKES RULE: 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g)

23 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g) states: 24 In no event shall a prisoner bring a civil action or appeal a

judgment in a civil action 25 or proceeding under this section if the prisoner has, on 3 or more prior occasions, while incarcerated or detained in any facility, brought an action or appeal in a court 26 of the United States that was dismissed on the grounds that it is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, unless the prisoner is 27 under imminent danger of serious physical injury. 28 1 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g). 2 “It is well-settled that, in determining a [Section] 1915(g) ‘strike,’ the reviewing court 3 looks to the dismissing court’s action and the reasons underlying it.” *Knapp v. Hogan*, 738 F.3d 4 1106, 1109 (9th Cir. 2013) (brackets added) (emphasis added) (citation omitted). “[Section] 5 1915(g) should be used to deny a prisoner’s in forma pauperis status only when, after careful 6 evaluation of the order dismissing an action, and other relevant information, the district court 7 determines that the action was dismissed because it was frivolous, malicious or failed to state a 8 claim.” *Andrews v. King*, 398 F.3d 1113, 1121 (9th Cir. 2006) (brackets added). “[W]hen a 9 district court disposes of an in forma pauperis complaint ‘on the grounds that [the claim] is 10 frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted,’ such a complaint 11 is ‘dismissed’ for purposes of § 1915(g) even if the district court styles such dismissal as denial of 12 the prisoner’s application to file the action without prepayment of the full filing fee.” *O’Neal v. 13 Price*, 531 F.3d 1146, 1153 (9th Cir. 2008) (second alteration in original). Dismissal also counts 14 as a strike under § 1915(g) “when (1) a district court dismisses a complaint on the ground that it 15 fails to state a claim, (2) the court grants leave to amend, and (3) the plaintiff then fails to file an 16 amended complaint” regardless of whether the case was dismissed with or without prejudice. 17 *Harris v. Mangum*, 863 F.3d 1133, 1142-43 (9th Cir. 2017). 18 An inmate who has accrued three strikes is precluded from proceeding in forma pauperis 19 unless he is “under imminent danger of serious physical injury.” 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g). To satisfy 20 the exception, the plaintiff must have alleged facts that demonstrate that he was “under imminent 21 danger of serious physical injury” at the time of filing the complaint. *Andrews v. Cervantes*, 493 22 F.3d 1047, 1053 (9th Cir. 2007) (“[I]t is the circumstances at the time of the filing of the 23 complaint that matters for purposes of the ‘imminent danger’ exception to § 1915(g).”); see also 24 *Abdul-Akbar v. McKelvie*, 239 F.3d 307, 312-14 (3rd Cir. 2001); *Medberry v. Butler*, 185 F.3d 25 1189, 1192-93 (11th Cir. 1999); *Ashley v. Dilworth*, 147 F.3d 715, 717 (8th Cir. 1998); *Banos v. 26 O’Guin*, 144 F.3d 883, 885 (5th Cir. 1998); *Lipsey v. Allison*, No. 1:21-cv-00912 GSA, 2021 WL 27 2390424, at *3 (E.D. Cal. June 11, 2021) (“The availability of the imminent danger exception 28 //// 1 turns on the conditions a prisoner faced at the time the complaint was filed, not at some earlier or 2 later time.”). 3 The danger faced by a prisoner at the time of filing must be imminent or ongoing. See, 4 e.g., *Medberry*, 185 F.3d at 1193 (finding plaintiff was not in either imminent or ongoing danger 5 and denying him ability to proceed in forma pauperis as three strikes litigant). “Imminent danger 6 of serious physical injury must be a real and present threat, not merely speculative or 7 hypothetical.” *Lipsey*, 2021 WL 2390424, at *3; *Blackman v. Mjening*, No. 1:16-cv-01421 LJO 8 GSA, 2016 WL 5815905, at *1 (E.D. Cal. Oct. 4, 2016). In addition, “the imminent danger 9 exception to the

[Prison Litigation Reform Act's] three strikes provision requires a nexus between the alleged imminent danger and the violations of law alleged in the complaint.” Ray v. Lara, 31 F.4th 692, 695 (9th Cir. 2022) (brackets added).

IV. DISCUSSION

A. Plaintiff Is a Three Strikes Litigant

The Court takes judicial notice of the fact that as early as June of 2012, Plaintiff was determined to be a three strikes litigant within the meaning of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g). See *McElroy v. Turner*, No. 2:12-cv-01182 CMK (“Turner”). In *Turner*, the Court found that the following cases that Plaintiff had filed in the Eastern District of California constituted strikes: • *McElroy v. Gebbmedin*, No. 1:08-cv-00124 LJO GSA (E.D. Cal. Dec. 11, 2008) (dismissed for failure to state a claim); • *McElroy v. Schultz*, No. 1:08-cv-00179 OWW MJS (E.D. Cal. Apr. 30, 2010) (dismissed for failure to state a claim), and • *McElroy v. California Dep’t of Corr.*, No. 2:08-cv-00733 HWG (E.D. Cal. June 3, 2009) (dismissed for failure to state a claim). See *Turner*, ECF No. 6 at 2 (order identifying Plaintiff as three strikes litigant). As a result, *Turner* was dismissed after Plaintiff failed to pay the filing fee in full within the period he was given.

The Court takes judicial notice of the fact that Plaintiff has previously been identified as a three strikes litigant. See *Kelly v. Sao*, 1:19-cv-00681 LJO BAM (E.D. Cal. July 25, 2019), ECF Nos. 6 n.9 and 9) (findings and recommendations; order adopting, respectively), 1 ordered to do so. See *Turner*, ECF No. 7 (order dismissing and closing case for failure to pay 2 filing fee in full). 3 Most recently, in May of 2023, Plaintiff was again identified as a three strikes litigant in 4 *McElroy v. Castro*, No. 1:23-cv-00559 SKO (“Castro,”). See *Castro*, ECF Nos. 6, 8 (three strikes 5 findings and recommendation order; order adopting same). In addition to identifying the three 6 above referenced matters as strikes, the *Castro* Court also identified four others: 7 • *McElroy v. City of Inglewood*, No. 2:02-cv-04301 MMM MLG (C.D. Cal. Nov. 20, 8 2002) (failure to state a claim); 9 • *McElroy v. City of Inglewood*, No. 2:03-cv-05034 UA MLG (C.D. Cal. July 25, 2003) 10 (dismissed as frivolous); 11 • *McElroy v. Institutional Head Ground*, No. 1:13-cv-00483-MJS (E.D. Cal. Nov. 1, 12 2013) (dismissed for failure to state a claim), and 13 • *McElroy v. Gomez*, No. 1:20-cv-00658 DADSAB (E.D. Cal. Dec. 10, 2020) 14 (dismissed for failure to state a claim; failure to comply with court order, and for failure to 15 prosecute). 16 *Castro*, ECF No. 6 at 2. 17 Thus, it is clear that Plaintiff has been a three strikes litigant for quite some time, and that 18 he is well aware of this status. As a result, absent the existence of exigent circumstances at the 19 time that he filed the instant matter, Plaintiff is required to pay the filing fee in full prior to 20 proceeding any further with it. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g). 21

B. Plaintiff Has Not Shown He Was in Imminent Danger of Serious Physical Harm

A review of Plaintiff’s complaint fails to sufficiently establish that he was in imminent 23 danger of serious physical harm when he filed it. The complaint is convoluted and rambling, 24 making it difficult to quickly identify defendants and claims alleged. It appears to allege 25 violations of right related to the failure to address disabilities that he has. See generally ECF No. 26 1 at 3-20. However, nothing in the complaint alleges that Plaintiff was in imminent danger of

27 serious physical harm at the time he filed the complaint. See *id.* 28 1 For these reasons, as a three strikes litigant who was not in imminent danger of serious 2 physical harm when he filed the instant complaint, Plaintiff is required under Section 1915(g) to 3 pay the filing fee in full before proceeding any further with this action. 4 Accordingly, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that the Clerk of Court shall randomly assign a 5 District Judge to this matter. 6 IT IS FURTHER RECOMMENDED that Plaintiff's application to proceed in forma 7 pauperis (ECF No. 2) be DENIED and that he be required to pay the filing fee in full prior to 8 proceeding any further with this matter. 9 These findings and recommendations are submitted to the United States District Judge 10 assigned to this case, pursuant to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1). Within fourteen days 11 after being served with these findings and recommendations, Plaintiff may file written objections 12 with the Court. Such a document should be captioned "Objections to Magistrate Judge's Findings 13 and Recommendations," and it shall not exceed fifteen pages. 14 The Court will not consider exhibits attached to the objections. To the extent that Plaintiff 15 wishes to refer to any exhibit, when possible, Plaintiff must reference the exhibit in the record by 16 its CM/ECF document and page number or reference the exhibit with specificity. Any pages filed 17 in excess of the fifteen-page limit may be disregarded by the District Judge when conducting the 18 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C) review of the findings and recommendations. Plaintiff's failure to file 19 objections within the specified time may result in the waiver of certain rights on appeal. See 20 *Wilkerson v. Wheeler*, 772 F.3d 834, 839 (9th Cir. 2014); *Martinez v. Ylst*, 951 F.2d 1153 (9th 21 Cir. 1991).

22 IT IS SO ORDERED. 23

24 Dated: June 25, 2025 /s/ Gary S. Austin

UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

25 26 27 28