

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF KANSAS

Ryan Christopher Cheatham v. Tim Easley, et al.

Cheatham · No. 25-3241-JWL · Decided December 22, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of Kansas addresses a pro se prisoner’s 42 U.S.C. § 1983 claims alleging excessive force and related Eighth Amendment violations arising from a pepperball deployment at a Kansas correctional facility. The court orders Kansas Department of Corrections officials to prepare a Martinez Report before screening the complaint and denies the plaintiff’s motion to appoint counsel without prejudice. The order also establishes procedures governing the report, service, discovery, and further filings.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Kansas
WRITING FOR THE COURT	John W. Lungstrum
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Kansas
DECIDED	December 22, 2025
DOCKET	25-3241-JWL
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	A pro se prisoner brought a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 action alleging Eighth and Sixth Amendment violations arising from the use of pepperball projectiles. Before screening the complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, the court ordered Kansas Department of Corrections officials to prepare a Martinez Report and denied the motion for appointment of counsel without prejudice.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	For statutory screening, the court applies the standards under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, liberally construes a pro se complaint, accepts well-pleaded allegations as true, and dismisses claims that are frivolous, malicious, fail to state a claim, or seek relief from an immune defendant. A complaint must contain sufficient factual matter to state a plausible claim for relief.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished
PARTIES	Ryan Christopher Cheatham v. Tim Easley, (fnu) Graham, (fnu) Bieberle, (fnu) Cobb, (fnu) Hopkins, (fnu) Ford

TOPICS

section 1983 prisoners rights civil rights cruel and unusual punishment civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights constitutional law prisoner litigation civil procedure appointment of counsel

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the complaint should be screened and dismissed or permitted to proceed before the court obtains additional factual information through a Martinez Report.
2. Whether the allegations labeled as excessive force, cruel and unusual punishment, and deliberate indifference constitute separate claims or are all analyzed as an Eighth Amendment excessive-force claim.
3. Whether plaintiff stated an excessive-force claim under the Sixth Amendment.
4. Whether appointment of counsel was warranted at the preliminary stage of the civil-rights action.

HOLDINGS

1. The court deferred substantive screening of the complaint and ordered appropriate Kansas Department of Corrections officials to prepare and file a Martinez Report because additional information was necessary to properly process the claims.
2. Plaintiff had no excessive-force claim under the Sixth Amendment, and his excessive-force, cruel-and-unusual-punishment, and deliberate-indifference allegations were treated as claims arising under the Eighth Amendment.
3. An inmate asserting excessive force must establish both an objective component—constitutionally significant harm—and a subjective component showing that officials acted with a sufficiently culpable state of mind; the core inquiry is whether force was used in a good-faith effort to maintain or restore discipline or maliciously and sadistically to cause harm.
4. The motion to appoint counsel was denied without prejudice because it was not yet clear that plaintiff had asserted a colorable claim, the issues were not shown to be complex, and plaintiff appeared capable of presenting the facts and arguments.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“To state a claim under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege the violation of a right secured by the Constitution and laws of the United States, and must show that the alleged deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law.”

“The court “will not supply additional factual allegations to round out a plaintiff’s complaint or construct a legal theory on a plaintiff’s behalf.””

“The Court finds that the proper processing of Plaintiff’s claims cannot be achieved without additional information from appropriate KDOC officials.”

“whenever prison officials stand accused of using excessive physical force in violation of the Cruel and Unusual Punishments Clause, the core judicial inquiry is . . . whether force was applied in a good-faith effort to maintain or restore discipline, or maliciously and sadistically to cause harm.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff, incarcerated at the El Dorado Correctional Facility, alleged that on July 4, 2025, officials and officers at the Larned State Correctional Facility ordered or approved the use of pepperball projectiles against him. He alleged that he was facing away from the officers with his hands raised in a submissive position when more than 100 shots were fired, causing bleeding, bruising, and injuries to his back and the back of his head. He asserted excessive-force, cruel-and-unusual-punishment, and deliberate-indifference claims under the Eighth Amendment and sought damages.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff filed the action and was granted leave to proceed in forma pauperis, but did not pay the assessed initial partial filing fee. The court determined that it could not properly process or screen the claims without additional factual information from Kansas Department of Corrections officials. It therefore ordered a Martinez Report, deferred screening, established related procedural restrictions, and denied plaintiff's motion to appoint counsel without prejudice.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988)
- Northington v. Jackson, 973 F.2d 1518, 1523 (10th Cir. 1992)
- Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007)
- Anderson v. Blake, 469 F.3d 910, 913 (10th Cir. 2006)
- Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555, 558, 570 (2007)
- Hall v. Bellmon, 935 F.2d 1106, 1110 (10th Cir. 1991)
- Nasious v. Two Unknown B.I.C.E. Agents, 492 F.3d 1158, 1163 (10th Cir. 2007)
- Whitney v. New Mexico, 113 F.3d 1170, 1173-74 (10th Cir. 1997)
- Kay v. Bemis, 500 F.3d 1214, 1218 (10th Cir. 2007)
- Smith v. United States, 561 F.3d 1090, 1098 (10th Cir. 2009)
- Robbins v. Oklahoma, 519 F.3d 1242, 1247 (10th Cir. 2008)
- Estate of Booker v. Gomez, 745 F.3d 405, 419 (10th Cir. 2014)
- Whitley v. Albers, 475 U.S. 312, 319-21 (1986)
- Smith v. Cochran, 339 F.3d 1205, 1212 (10th Cir. 2003)
- Hudson v. McMillian, 503 U.S. 1, 6-10 (1992)

- Johnson v. Glick, 481 F.2d 1028, 1033 (2d Cir. 1973)
- Reed v. Smith, 1999 WL 345492, at *4 (10th Cir. 1999)
- Moody v. Cory, 2010 WL 147268, at *4 (D. Kan. 2010)
- Martinez v. Aaron, 570 F.2d 317 (10th Cir. 1978)
- Carper v. DeLand, 54 F.3d 613, 616 (10th Cir. 1995)
- Johnson v. Johnson, 466 F.3d 1213, 1217 (10th Cir. 2006)
- Rachel v. Troutt, 820 F.3d 390, 396 (10th Cir. 2016)
- Williams v. Meese, 926 F.2d 994, 996 (10th Cir. 1991)
- Steffey v. Orman, 461 F.3d 1218, 1223 (10th Cir. 2006)
- Hill v. SmithKline Beecham Corp., 393 F.3d 1111, 1115 (10th Cir. 2004)
- Rucks v. Boergermann, 57 F.3d 978, 979 (10th Cir. 1995)

Retrieved from lawtools.ai · <https://lawtools.ai/cases/federal/united-states-district-court-for-the-district-of-kansas/2025/ryan-christopher-cheatham-v-tim-easley-et-al-7om7ixg0>