

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
PENNSYLVANIA

Boyer-White v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, et al.

Boyer-White · No. 2:25-cv-06550 · Decided February 2, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania grants Gusir Dayshon Boyer-White leave to proceed in forma pauperis but dismisses his § 1983 complaint in part with prejudice and in part without prejudice. Claims against the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Coatesville Police Department, and Warden Howard Holland are dismissed with prejudice, while malicious prosecution claims are dismissed without prejudice under Heck v. Humphrey and false arrest and false imprisonment claims are dismissed without prejudice for failure to plead the absence of probable cause. The court grants leave to amend the latter claims.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Mia R. Perez
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania
DECIDED	February 2, 2026
DOCKET	2:25-cv-06550
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Pro se prisoner civil-rights action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983; the court granted leave to proceed in forma pauperis and screened the Complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii).
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii), the court applies the Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6) plausibility standard, accepting well-pleaded facts as true, drawing reasonable inferences in the plaintiff's favor, and construing a pro se complaint liberally while disregarding conclusory allegations.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished
PARTIES	Gusir Dayshon Boyer-White v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Coatesville Police Department, Howard Holland, Steven M. Parkinson

TOPICS

section 1983 prisoners rights fourth amendment motions to dismiss civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights constitutional law civil procedure criminal procedure remedies post-conviction relief

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the claims against the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania are cognizable under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and barred by the Eleventh Amendment.
2. Whether the Coatesville Police Department is a proper defendant in a § 1983 action.
3. Whether the claims against Warden Howard Holland fail for lack of allegations of personal involvement.
4. Whether Boyer-White's challenge to his arrest and prosecution is barred by Heck v. Humphrey because success would imply the invalidity of his conviction.
5. Whether the Complaint plausibly alleged Fourth Amendment false arrest or false imprisonment by alleging the absence of probable cause.
6. Whether release from custody is available in a § 1983 civil action.

HOLDINGS

1. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is not a person subject to liability under § 1983, and the Eleventh Amendment bars the claims because Pennsylvania has not waived its immunity for § 1983 actions.
2. The Coatesville Police Department is not a proper defendant because a municipal police department is generally not legally separate from the municipality it serves for purposes of § 1983 liability.
3. The claims against Warden Holland fail because the Complaint contains no factual allegations showing his personal involvement in any constitutional violation, and § 1983 liability cannot rest solely on supervisory status.
4. The malicious-prosecution claim and any constitutional challenge to the conviction are barred by Heck v. Humphrey because Boyer-White's conviction resulted in a guilty plea and has not been invalidated or favorably terminated.
5. The potential Fourth Amendment false-arrest and false-imprisonment claims fail because the Complaint does not allege facts showing that Officer Parkinson lacked probable cause.
6. The court cannot grant release from custody in a § 1983 civil action; a prisoner seeking immediate or speedier release must pursue habeas corpus.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“when a prisoner “is challenging the very fact or duration of his physical imprisonment, and the relief he seeks is a determination that he is entitled to immediate release or a speedier release from that imprisonment, his sole federal remedy is a writ of habeas corpus”” (at 2 n.2)

“A claim . . . bearing that relationship to a conviction or sentence that has not been so invalidated is not cognizable under § 1983.” (at 8)

“Fourth Amendment false imprisonment and false arrest claims rise and fall on whether probable cause existed for the arrest.” (at 9)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Boyer-White alleged that Officer Steven M. Parkinson arrested him on November 1, 2023, purportedly under a felony arrest warrant that he claimed was never issued. He also alleged that the affidavit of probable cause lacked a judge's signature and seal and sought damages and release from custody. The related state criminal proceedings resulted in a negotiated guilty plea and sentence, and the conviction had not been reversed, invalidated, or otherwise favorably terminated.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Boyer-White filed a § 1983 Complaint alleging constitutional violations arising from his November 1, 2023 arrest and subsequent criminal prosecution. The court granted in forma pauperis status, judicially noticed the related Pennsylvania criminal dockets, and found that the claims against the Commonwealth, the Coatesville Police Department, and Warden Holland failed as a matter of law. It dismissed those claims with prejudice, dismissed the malicious-prosecution claim without prejudice under Heck, dismissed potential false-arrest and false-imprisonment claims without prejudice for failure to plead lack of probable cause, and granted leave to amend those latter claims.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- *Tourscher v. McCullough*, 184 F.3d 236, 240 (3d Cir. 1999)
- *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009)
- *Talley v. Wetzel*, 15 F.4th 275, 286 n.7 (3d Cir. 2021)
- *Shorter v. United States*, 12 F.4th 366, 374 (3d Cir. 2021)
- *Fisher v. Hollingsworth*, 115 F.4th 197 (3d Cir. 2024)
- *Martinez v. UPMC Susquehanna*, 986 F.3d 261, 266 (3d Cir. 2021)
- *Vogt v. Wetzel*, 8 F.4th 182, 185 (3d Cir. 2021)
- *Mala v. Crown Bay Marina, Inc.*, 704 F.3d 239, 244-45 (3d Cir. 2013)
- *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988)
- *Rode v. Dellarciprete*, 845 F.2d 1195, 1207 (3d Cir. 1988)
- *Will v. Michigan Department of State Police*, 491 U.S. 58, 65-66 (1989)
- *Martin v. Red Lion Police Department*, 146 F. App'x 558, 562 n.3 (3d Cir. 2005)
- *Bonenberger v. Plymouth Township*, 132 F.3d 20, 25 (3d Cir. 1997)

- Colburn v. Upper Darby Township, 838 F.2d 663, 671 n.7 (3d Cir. 1988)
- Bush v. City of Philadelphia Police Department, 684 F. Supp. 2d 634, 636 (E.D. Pa. 2010)
- Emil Jutrowski v. Township of Riverdale, Jutrowski v. Township of Riverdale, 904 F.3d 280, 290 (3d Cir. 2018)
- Chavarriaga v. New Jersey Department of Corrections, 806 F.3d 210, 227 (3d Cir. 2015)
- Robinson v. Delbalso, No. 22-2378, 2022 WL 17248100, at *2 (3d Cir. Nov. 28, 2022) (per curiam)
- Saisi v. Murray, 822 F. App'x 47, 48 (3d Cir. 2020)
- Buck v. Hampton Township School District, 452 F.3d 256, 260 (3d Cir. 2006)
- Wallace v. Kato, 549 U.S. 384, 390 (2007)
- Noviho v. Lancaster County of Pennsylvania, 683 F. App'x 160, 164, 166 (3d Cir. 2017)
- Myers v. Koopman, 738 F.3d 1190, 1195 (10th Cir. 2013)
- Heck v. Humphrey, 512 U.S. 477, 486-87 (1994)
- Wilkinson v. Dotson, 544 U.S. 74, 81-82 (2005)
- Chiaverini v. City of Napoleon, Ohio, 602 U.S. 556, 558 (2024)
- Walker v. North Wales Borough, 395 F. Supp. 2d 219, 232 (E.D. Pa. 2005)
- Curry v. Yachera, 835 F.3d 373, 379 (3d Cir. 2016)
- Massey v. Pfeifer, 804 F. App'x 113, 116 (3d Cir. 2020)
- Montgomery v. De Simone, 159 F.3d 120, 126 n.5 (3d Cir. 1998)
- Orsatti v. New Jersey State Police, 71 F.3d 480, 482-83 (3d Cir. 1995)
- Harvard v. Cesnalis, 973 F.3d 190, 199 (3d Cir. 2020)
- Preiser v. Rodriguez, 411 U.S. 475, 500 (1973)
- Jaffery v. Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office, 695 F. App'x 38, 41-42 (3d Cir. 2017)
- Duran v. Weeks, 399 F. App'x 756, 759 (3d Cir. 2010)
- Higgins v. Bayada Home Health Care Inc., 62 F.4th 755, 763 (3d Cir. 2023)
- Laborers' International Union of North America, AFL-CIO v. Foster Wheeler Energy Corp., 26 F.3d 375, 398 (3d Cir. 1994)
- Beahm v. Burke, 982 F. Supp. 2d 451, 458 (E.D. Pa. 2013)
- Caldwell v. Beard, 324 F. App'x 186, 189 (3d Cir. 2011)