

VERMONT SUPERIOR COURT, CIVIL DIVISION, BENNINGTON UNIT

Shawn Mateo v. David Barra

Mateo · No. 24-CV-05337 · Decided February 4, 2026

SUMMARY

The Vermont Superior Court dismissed Shawn Mateo’s civil action against Judge David Barra under the doctrine of judicial immunity. The court held that the challenged conduct consisted solely of judicial decisions and rulings made within Judge Barra’s judicial authority, while noting that Mateo could pursue appellate remedies in the underlying cases.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Vermont Superior Court, Civil Division, Bennington Unit
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Mary Miles Teachout
JURISDICTION	Vermont Superior Court, Civil Division, Bennington Unit
DECIDED	February 4, 2026
DOCKET	24-CV-05337
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The plaintiff filed a civil complaint against the presiding judge of the Bennington Unit, alleging that the judge violated his constitutional rights through rulings in cases in which the plaintiff was a party. Before service was proved or an answer was filed, the specially assigned superior judge dismissed the action based on judicial immunity.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court applied the legal doctrine of judicial immunity to the allegations in the complaint; no separate standard of review was stated.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown

TOPICS

- civil procedure
- civil rights
- due process
- constitutional law
- remedies

PRACTICE AREAS

- civil procedure
- civil rights
- constitutional law
- judicial immunity
- remedies

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether judicial immunity bars a civil action against a judicial officer for decisions and legal rulings made in cases in which the plaintiff was a party.
2. Whether the conduct alleged was performed within the judicial officer's jurisdiction and in a judicial capacity.

HOLDINGS

1. A judicial officer is immune from a private civil action for acts performed within the officer's jurisdiction and in a judicial capacity.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Immunity from liability in favor of the judges rests upon the broad ground of public policy, which declares that a judge, for acts done by him in his judicial capacity, is absolutely privileged from action.” (Order Page 1)

“No judge could act independently if conscious that he was exposed to an action by every disappointed suitor in his court.” (Order Page 1)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Mateo sued David Barra, the presiding judge of the Bennington Unit of the Vermont Superior Court, based on rulings Barra made in cases involving Mateo. The complaint alleged violations of the Seventh and Fourteenth Amendments, including denial of an opportunity to present evidence. An attached order showed that Barra had denied a motion in *Ballinallee Properties, LLC v. Shawn Mateo*, No. 23-CV-05342.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Mateo filed the complaint on December 16, 2024, and the court issued a summons on December 18, 2024. The record contained no proof of service and no answer. The court reviewed the complaint and an attached order from another case and dismissed the action because the challenged conduct consisted solely of judicial rulings.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- *Vaughan v. Congdon*, 56 Vt. 111
- *Banister v. Wakeman*, 64 Vt. 203, 23 A. 585 (1891)
- *Placa v. Lowery*, 134 Vt. 56, 56–58, 349 A.2d 235, 236 (1975)