

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

Calvin Willis v. Matthew Taylor, et al.

Willis · No. 22-cv-03427-HSG · Decided October 23, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of California ordered Plaintiff Calvin Willis to participate in a November 4, 2025 deposition and directed any counsel representing him to file a notice of appearance and confer with defense counsel. The Court warned that failure to participate or comply with its prior discovery order could result in terminating sanctions, including dismissal under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(b), and ordered related status reports and a potential response to an order to show cause.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Haywood S. Gilliam, Jr.
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
DECIDED	October 23, 2025
DOCKET	22-cv-03427-HSG
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	In a pro se prisoner civil-rights action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, the district court issued an order directing Plaintiff to participate in a scheduled deposition and requiring a response to a potential failure-to-prosecute dismissal if the deposition did not occur.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown; district-court order directing compliance and issuing an order to show cause.
PARTIES	Calvin Willis v. Matthew Taylor, et al.

TOPICS

- discovery dispute
- sanctions
- civil procedure
- section 1983
- prisoners rights

PRACTICE AREAS

- civil procedure
- prisoner civil rights
- discovery sanctions

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the court should direct Plaintiff to participate in the scheduled November 4, 2025 deposition and require counsel, if any, to enter an appearance and coordinate the deposition.
2. Whether continued failure to participate in the deposition or comply with the court's discovery order could support terminating sanctions or dismissal for failure to prosecute under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(b).

HOLDINGS

1. Plaintiff must participate in the November 4, 2025 deposition. If Plaintiff is represented by counsel, counsel must be present, and counsel must file a notice of appearance and confer with defense counsel before the deposition.
2. If Plaintiff fails to participate in the deposition or otherwise disobeys the court's order, the court may consider sanctions, including dismissal under Federal Rules of Civil Procedure 37(b)(2) and 41(b), and Plaintiff must show cause why the action should not be dismissed if the deposition does not occur.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The Federal Rules of Civil Procedure require Plaintiff to allow Defendant to conduct discovery regarding any nonprivileged matter that is relevant to the case, which would include taking Plaintiff’s deposition.” (at 3)

“These further orders may include prohibiting the disobedient party from supporting or opposing designated claims or defenses, or from introducing designated matters in evidence, or dismissing the action or proceeding in whole or in part.” (at 3-4)

“The Court ORDERS Plaintiff to participate in his November 4, 2025 deposition.” (at 4)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Calvin Willis, a California state inmate proceeding in a § 1983 action, alleged that Defendant Matthew Taylor used excessive force against him at San Quentin State Prison on March 14, 2019. Defendant attempted to depose Willis four times between March and October 2025, but the deposition did not occur because of a transfer, Willis's stated efforts to obtain counsel, or uncertainty about whether counsel represented him. The court had previously compelled the deposition and warned that failure to participate could result in discovery sanctions or dismissal.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff filed the action in June 2022 alleging that a correctional officer used excessive force in violation of the Eighth Amendment. After several unsuccessful attempts to depose Plaintiff, the court ordered Plaintiff on October 14, 2025, to appear for and participate in a deposition and warned that noncompliance could result in sanctions or dismissal. The deposition was rescheduled for November 4, 2025, and this order directed Plaintiff and counsel to comply with specified appearance and reporting requirements and ordered Plaintiff to show cause if the deposition did not occur.

DISPOSITION

CASES CITED

- King v. Atiyeh, 814 F.2d 565, 567 (9th Cir. 1987)
- Lacey v. Maricopa Cty., 693 F.3d 896 (9th Cir. 2012)
- Chambers v. NASCO, Inc., 501 U.S. 32, 43 (1991)
- Link v. Wabash Railroad Co., 370 U.S. 626, 630-32 (1961)

OPINION

1 2 3 4 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT 5 NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA 6 7
CALVIN WILLIS, Case No. 22-cv-03427-HSG 8 Plaintiff, ORDER DIRECTING PLAINTIFF
TO SHOW CAUSE WHY CASE SHOULD 9 v. NOT BE DISMISSED FOR FAILURE TO
PROSECUTE 10 MATTHEW TAYLOR, et al., Re: Dkt. No. 39 11 Defendants. 12 13 In June
2022, Plaintiff, a California state inmate who is currently housed at California 14 Men's Colony,
filed this pro se civil rights action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, alleging that, on 15 March 14,
2019, San Quentin State Prison ("SQSP") correctional officer Taylor used excessive 16 force on
him, in violation of the Eighth Amendment.

Dkt. Nos. 1, 11. For the reasons set forth 17 below and as detailed below, the Court ORDERS
Plaintiff's counsel to file a notice of appearance, 18 and ORDERS the parties to file certain status
reports or an answer regarding the November 4, 19 2025 deposition. 20 I. Background 21 On
January 27, 2025, the Court set an April 30, 2025 deadline for filing dispositive 22 motions.

Dkt. No. 31. Over the next ten months, Defendant attempted to depose Plaintiff four 23 times
without success. 24 • March 24, 2025. Plaintiff was unexpectedly transferred to a different fire
camp, requiring the cancellation of this deposition. Dkt. No. 32 at 2. 25 • May 29, 2025. Plaintiff
refused to participate in this deposition, stating that he was 26 in the process of retaining counsel
for this case.

Defense counsel and Plaintiff agreed the deposition would be rescheduled once Plaintiff retained
counsel or if 27 Plaintiff were unable to retain counsel. Dkt. No. 34 at 1-2, 11. • July 15, 2025.
Plaintiff refused to sit for this deposition, stating that he was 1 unaware that the deposition had
been scheduled, and that he had not received the Court's June 5, 2025 Order requiring Plaintiff to
have his counsel file a notice of 2 appearance by June 16, 2025.

Dkt. No. 36-1 at 18-19. Plaintiff stated that he had been unable to obtain an attorney because of
excessive transfers; that he just needed 3 "a little bit more time, whether it's 30 days, 60 days" to
obtain counsel; and that if he were unable to retain an attorney within any time period ordered by
the Court he 4 would proceed with the deposition. Dkt. No. 36-1 at 19-22.

5 • October 7, 2025. Plaintiff informed Defendant's counsel that he was represented by counsel but that counsel was unable to attend the deposition. Plaintiff was 6 unable to provide Defendant's counsel with the name or contact information for his attorney but stated that he would give his attorney the contact information for 7 Defendant's counsel. Plaintiff stated that he wished to proceed with the deposition without his attorney present.

Defendant's counsel informed Plaintiff that if 8 Plaintiff was represented by counsel, ethics rules prohibited her from taking his deposition without his attorney present. 9 On October 14, 2025, the Court granted Defendant's request to compel Plaintiff's 10 deposition: 11 The Court GRANTS nunc pro tunc Defendant's request for an extension of time to 12 September 15, 2025, for Plaintiff's counsel, if any, to file a notice of appearance.

The deadline has passed, yet Plaintiff has not obtained counsel or otherwise communicated 13 with the Court. The Court therefore GRANTS Defendant's request that the Court compel Plaintiff to sit for his deposition. The Court ORDERS Plaintiff to appear for, and 14 participate in, his deposition. Plaintiff is cautioned that failure to appear for, and to participate in, his deposition may result in sanctions.

Possible sanctions are evidentiary 15 sanctions directing that certain facts be taken as established; and/or striking pleadings in whole or in part; and/or partial or complete dismissal of the action for failure to prosecute 16 or failure to comply with a court order. Fed. R. Civ. P. 37(b)(2).

The Court will not grant Plaintiff any further extensions of time to sit for this deposition. In addition, while Plaintiff 17 may continue to seek counsel, the Court will not grant any further deadline extensions in this case because of Plaintiff's legal representation, lack of legal representation, or attempts 18 to obtain counsel.

The case has been pending since 2022, and Plaintiff has thus far been unable to obtain counsel. The Court notes that Plaintiff has ably prosecuted this case thus 19 far. Within two weeks of the date of this order, Defendant shall re-notice Plaintiff's 20 deposition and file the notice of deposition with the Court. If Plaintiff again fails to sit for, or participate in, his deposition, Defendant may seek evidentiary sanctions, or may move 21 for dismissal of this action for failure to prosecute or failure to obey a court order pursuant to Fed.

R. Civ. P. 41(b). 22 Dkt. No. 37 at 4. 23 Defendant has rescheduled Plaintiff's deposition for November 4, 2025. Dkt. No. 38. 24 Defendant's counsel has informed the Court that she is concerned that she will be unable to 25 comply with the Court's order to depose Plaintiff if, at the November 4, 2025 deposition, Plaintiff 26 again states that he is represented by counsel yet Plaintiff's counsel is not present and Plaintiff's 27 counsel has neither filed a notice of appearance nor contacted Defendant's counsel.

Dkt. No. 39. 1 As of the date of this order, no attorney has entered an appearance on behalf of Plaintiff. 2 Plaintiff's refusal to sit for a deposition without counsel and his claim that he is 3 represented by counsel despite no counsel appearing on his behalf are preventing this case from 4 moving forward. Plaintiff appearing for his deposition without counsel while stating that he is 5 represented by counsel is a violation of the Court's October 14, 2025 Order compelling Plaintiff to 6 participate in his deposition.

If Plaintiff claims to be represented by counsel, Defendant's counsel 7 cannot take Plaintiff's deposition without Plaintiff's counsel being present. If Plaintiff is 8 represented by counsel, his counsel must be present at the deposition. Defendant cannot defend 9 this case without Plaintiff's good-faith participation in the discovery process, which includes 10 participating in the deposition.

11 The Court reminds Plaintiff that the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure apply to both 12 represented and pro se litigants. *King v. Atiyeh*, 814 F.2d 565, 567 (9th Cir. 1987) overruled on 13 other grounds by *Lacey v. Maricopa Cty.*, 693 F.3d 896 (9th Cir. 2012) ("Pro se litigants must 14 follow the same rules of procedure that govern other litigants.").

The Federal Rules of Civil 15 Procedure require Plaintiff to allow Defendant to conduct discovery regarding any nonprivileged 16 matter that is relevant to the case, which would include taking Plaintiff's deposition. See 17 generally Fed. R. Civ. P. 26.

The Court further reminds Plaintiff that both the Federal Rules of 18 Civil Procedure and the court's inherent power to manage its docket provide that terminating 19 sanctions may be appropriate where a party refuses to cooperate in discovery or refuses to obey a 20 court order. Fed. R. Civ. P. 37 governs a party's failure to cooperate in discovery and provides 21 that where a party "fails to obey an order to provide or permit discovery..., the court where the 22 action is pending may issue further just orders." Fed.

R. Civ. P. 37(b)(2). These further orders 23 may include prohibiting the disobedient party from supporting or opposing designated claims or 24 defenses, or from introducing designated matters in evidence, or dismissing the action or 25 proceeding in whole or in part. *Id.* Under Fed. R. Civ. P. 41(b), a district court may impose 26 sanctions, including involuntary dismissal of a plaintiff's case, where that plaintiff fails to 27 prosecute his or her case, or fails to comply with the Court's orders, or fails to comply the Federal 1 Cir.

1992) ("Pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(b), the district court may dismiss an 2 action for failure to comply with any order of the court"). Furthermore, district courts have 3 inherent power "to manage their own affairs so as to achieve the orderly and expeditious 4 disposition of cases." *Chambers v. NASCO, Inc.*, 501 U.S. 32, 43 (1991) (internal quotation marks 5 and citation omitted).

In exercising that power, a district court may impose sanctions including, 6 where appropriate, dismissal. Link v. Wabash Railroad Co., 370 U.S. 626, 630-32 (1961). 7 II. Directions to Parties 8 In light of Plaintiff's prior failures to participate in his deposition, the Court ORDERS as 9 follows. 10 1.

The Court ORDERS Plaintiff to participate in his November 4, 2025 deposition. If 11 Plaintiff is represented by counsel, counsel must be present at the deposition. If there is no 12 counsel present at the deposition, Plaintiff is cautioned that any statement that he is represented by 13 counsel despite no counsel being present and no notice of appearance being filed will be 14 considered a violation of the Court's October 14, 2025 Order compelling him to participate in his 15 deposition.

16 2. If Plaintiff is represented by counsel, Plaintiff's counsel shall, by October 31, 2025: 17 (1)file a notice of appearance; (2) contact Defendant's counsel to meet and confer regarding the 18 November 4, 2025 deposition; and (3) file a notice with the Court confirming that they have 19 conferred with Defendant's counsel regarding the deposition. 20 3. By November 11, 2025, Defendant shall file a status report with the Court, 21 reporting whether the November 4, 2025 deposition took place or, if the deposition does not take 22 place, why the deposition failed to proceed and address whether terminating sanctions are 23 appropriate.

24 4. If the November 4, 2025 deposition does not take place, by November 11, 2025, 25 Plaintiff is ordered to show cause why the Court should not dismiss this action pursuant to Fed. R. 26 Civ. P. 41(b) for failure to prosecute or failure to comply with the Court's October 14, 2025 Order 27 compelling Plaintiff to participate in his deposition.

To respond to the order to show cause, 1 should not dismiss this action with prejudice pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 41(b). 2 IT IS SO ORDERED. 3 || Dated: 10/23/2025 ' HAYWOOD S. GILLIAM, JR. □ 5 United States District Judge 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 © 15 16 = 17 Z 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28