

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
INDIANA, FORT WAYNE DIVISION

William D. Heffley v. Brady Thomas, et al.

Heffley · No. 1:26-CV-99-HAB-ALT · Decided May 14, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana addressed William Heffley's motion to proceed in forma pauperis and screened his civil rights complaint alleging police harassment, intimidation, and retaliation. The court found that the complaint lacked sufficient factual detail and failed to state a plausible constitutional claim. The court took the IFP motion under advisement, granted leave to amend by June 12, 2026, and warned that the action would be dismissed if no amended complaint was filed.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana, Fort Wayne Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Holly A. Brady
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana, Fort Wayne Division
DECIDED	May 14, 2026
DOCKET	1:26-CV-99-HAB-ALT
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	A pro se plaintiff filed a civil-rights complaint under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and moved to proceed in forma pauperis. Before service, the district court screened the complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), found that it failed to provide sufficient factual detail and did not state a plausible federal claim, and granted leave to amend.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court applied the same standard used for a motion to dismiss under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6) when screening the complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), accepting factual allegations as true and requiring sufficient factual matter to state a plausible claim for relief.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished

PARTIES

William D. Heffley v. Brady Thomas, Detective Olinske

TOPICS

pleadings

section 1983

first amendment

civil procedure

subject matter jurisdiction

PRACTICE AREAS

Civil procedure

Civil rights

Constitutional law

Federal courts

Pleading and screening

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Heffley satisfied the financial requirement to proceed in forma pauperis.
2. Whether the complaint complied with Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8 by providing sufficient factual detail and fair notice to each defendant.
3. Whether allegations of police harassment, supervisory inaction, and unspecified retaliation stated a plausible constitutional claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.
4. Whether the complaint should be dismissed at the screening stage under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), or whether Heffley should receive leave to amend.

HOLDINGS

1. Heffley met the financial requirement for proceeding in forma pauperis because, based on his reported income and assets, paying the filing fee would prevent him from providing for the necessities of life.
2. The complaint did not comply with Rule 8 because its conclusory allegations did not give each defendant fair notice of the conduct alleged to be wrongful.
3. Allegations of police harassment, without additional conduct amounting to a constitutional violation, do not state a cognizable § 1983 claim.
4. The alleged failure of Sheriff Thomas to act on a complaint of police harassment did not state a cognizable constitutional claim.
5. The complaint did not state a plausible First Amendment retaliation claim because it did not provide factual detail identifying the retaliatory activities or showing that they would deter a person of ordinary firmness from exercising First Amendment rights.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Each defendant is entitled to know what he or she did that is asserted to be wrongful.”

“Baldly asserting that ‘the police harassed me, Olinske was involved, Thomas knew and did nothing about it’ does not include sufficient information to provide notice to the defendants of what Heffley believes they did to violate his rights and thus does not comply with Rule 8.”

“police harassment, without more, cannot form a basis for a § 1983 cause of action.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Heffley alleged that DeKalb County police officers intimidated and harassed him, that he reported the conduct to law enforcement, and that no investigation or corrective action followed. He alleged that Sheriff Brady Thomas was responsible for supervising officers and addressing misconduct complaints, while Detective Olinske personally participated in or contributed to further actions against him after receiving notice of his complaints. He claimed that the harassment escalated in retaliation for reporting police misconduct and caused fear, stress, emotional distress, and disruption to his daily activities.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Heffley filed a complaint alleging intimidation and harassment by law-enforcement defendants and submitted an in forma pauperis motion. The court found that he satisfied the financial requirement for proceeding in forma pauperis but took the motion under advisement pending screening of the complaint. The court determined that the complaint did not comply with Rule 8 and failed to state a plausible constitutional claim, granted leave to file an amended complaint by June 12, 2026, and cautioned that failure to respond would result in dismissal without further notice.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319 (1989)
- *Merritte v. Templeton*, 493 F. App'x 782, 784 (7th Cir. 2012)
- *Rowe v. Shake*, 196 F.3d 778, 783 (7th Cir. 1999)
- *Luevano v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.*, 722 F.3d 1014, 1018, 1027 (7th Cir. 2013)
- *EEOC v. Concentra Health Serv., Inc.*, 496 F.3d 773, 776-77 (7th Cir. 2007)
- *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007)
- *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009)
- *Bank of America, N.A. v. Knight*, 725 F.3d 815, 818 (7th Cir. 2013)
- *Arnold v. Truemper*, 833 F. Supp. 678, 682-83 (N.D. Ill. 1993)
- *Slagel v. Shell Oil Refinery*, 811 F. Supp. 378, 382 (C.D. Ill. 1993), *aff'd*, 23 F.3d 410 (7th Cir. 1994)
- *Slagel v. Shell Oil Refinery*, 1994 WL 168503, at *1 (7th Cir. May 4, 1994)
- *Bridges v. Gilbert*, 557 F.3d 541, 552 (7th Cir. 2009)
- *Harris v. City of West Chi.*, 2002 WL 3100188, at *3 (N.D. Ill. Sept. 3, 2002)
- *Baden v. City of Wheaton*, 2010 WL 4931852, at *3-4 (N.D. Ill. Nov. 24, 2010)
- *Shabani v. Kalka*, 2020 WL 3100242, at *2 (W.D. Wis. June 11, 2020)