

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
INDIANA

Christopher Wilson v. Joseph Hutter, Allen County Building
Commissioner, et al.

Wilson · No. 1:23-cv-00184-HAB-ALT · Decided April 28, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana dismissed Christopher Wilson’s remaining procedural due process claims under the Fourteenth Amendment and 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The court dismissed the claims with prejudice under Federal Rules of Civil Procedure 16(f)(1) and 41(b), and its inherent authority, based on Wilson’s failures to respond to a summary judgment motion, appear at a status conference, and show cause for his nonappearance. The court directed the Clerk to close the case.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Andrew L. Teel
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana
DECIDED	April 28, 2026
DOCKET	1:23-cv-00184-HAB-ALT
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The district court sua sponte dismissed the plaintiff’s remaining procedural due process claims with prejudice as a sanction for failure to comply with court orders and for failure to prosecute.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Dismissal under Rules 16(f) and 41(b) for failure to prosecute or obey court orders requires a record of willfulness, bad faith, fault, clear delay, or contumacious conduct; dismissal is appropriate in extreme situations when less drastic sanctions have been ineffective or adequate notice has been provided.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court opinion

TOPICS

- sanctions
- civil procedure
- section 1983
- fourteenth amendment

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

civil rights

constitutional law

municipal law

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the court could sua sponte dismiss the remaining claims with prejudice under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 16(f) for failure to appear at a scheduling conference and failure to obey court orders.
2. Whether the court could dismiss the action with prejudice under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(b) and its inherent authority for repeated failure to prosecute.
3. Whether Wilson received sufficient notice and opportunity to be heard before dismissal.

HOLDINGS

1. A court may sua sponte dismiss an action with prejudice under Rule 16(f), through the sanctions authorized by Rule 37(b)(2)(A), when a party fails to appear at a scheduling or pretrial conference or fails to obey a court order, and the record establishes culpable or contumacious conduct.
2. A district court may sua sponte dismiss an action with prejudice under Rule 41(b) and its inherent authority to manage its docket when a plaintiff's repeated failures to comply with court orders and appear in the case constitute contumacious conduct and demonstrate failure to prosecute.
3. Dismissal was permissible because Wilson received fair notice that failure to comply with the court's orders and attend proceedings could result in dismissal, as well as opportunities to explain his noncompliance.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The sanction of dismissal is appropriate only in extreme situations when there is a clear record of delay or contumacious conduct, or when other less drastic sanctions have proven unavailing.” (4)

“For the foregoing reasons, the Court sua sponte DISMISSES Willson’s remaining claims WITH PREJUDICE pursuant to Federal Rules of Civil Procedure 16(f)(1) and 41(b) and the Court’s inherent power to manage its own affairs” (6)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Wilson alleged that Allen County officials violated his constitutional rights by revoking his Master Electrician license and his business's electrical-contractor license and by conditioning or denying permits. After several claims and defendants were dismissed, Wilson repeatedly failed to comply with litigation obligations, including responding to a second summary-judgment motion and appearing at a court-ordered status and scheduling conference. He also failed to respond to a second show-cause order, despite receiving orders and warnings that dismissal could be imposed.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Wilson filed this civil-rights action in May 2023 and later filed an amended complaint. Following screening and summary-judgment rulings, only procedural due process claims under the Fourteenth Amendment and 42 U.S.C.

§ 1983 remained against certain individual defendants and the Allen County Board of Commissioners. Wilson failed to respond to a second summary-judgment motion, failed to appear at a status and scheduling conference, and failed to respond to a show-cause order despite prior warnings that dismissal could result. The court dismissed the remaining claims with prejudice under Rules 16(f)(1) and 41(b) and its inherent docket-management authority.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Long v. Steepro, 213 F.3d 983, 986 (7th Cir. 2000)
- James v. McDonald's Corp., 417 F.3d 672, 681 (7th Cir. 2005)
- Alexander v. Casino Queen Inc., 321 F. App'x 509, 511 (7th Cir. 2009)
- English v. Cowell, 969 F.2d 465, 473 (7th Cir. 1992)
- Lucien v. Breweur, 9 F.3d 26, 29 (7th Cir. 1993)
- Johnson v. Berrien County, Mich., No. 3:19-cv-106 DRL-MGG, 2020 WL 5258261, at *1 (N.D. Ind. Sept. 3, 2020)
- Renehan v. Social Security Administration, No. 1:19-cv-04643-JRS-TAB, 2020 WL 6681636, at *1 (S.D. Ind. Nov. 12, 2020)
- Ball v. City of Chicago, 2 F.3d 752, 755-56 (7th Cir. 1993)
- Tylicki v. Ryan, 244 F.R.D. 146, 147 (N.D.N.Y. 2006)
- Snyder v. Nolen, 380 F.3d 279, 285 (7th Cir. 2004)

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