

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
VIRGINIA, RICHMOND DIVISION

Esther Perkins v. Chesterfield Police, et al.

Perkins · No. 3:25CV310 (RCY) · Decided February 23, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia reviews Esther Perkins’s in forma pauperis complaint alleging an unlawful arrest and detention by the Chesterfield County Police Department and Officer S.L. Morris under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The court grants in forma pauperis status, finds that the complaint fails to state a claim against either defendant, and orders Plaintiff to show cause why the action should not be dismissed rather than dismissing it immediately.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, Richmond Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Roderick C. Young
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, Richmond Division
DECIDED	February 23, 2026
DOCKET	3:25CV310 (RCY)
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff proceeding pro se filed a proposed 42 U.S.C. § 1983 complaint and an application to proceed in forma pauperis. The court granted the in forma pauperis application, screened the complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2), found that the pleaded claims failed to state a claim, and ordered Plaintiff to show cause why the action should not be dismissed.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2), the court must screen an in forma pauperis complaint and dismiss it if it fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted. A pro se complaint must contain enough facts to state a facially plausible claim and is liberally construed.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown
PARTIES	Esther Perkins v. Chesterfield Police, S.L. Morris

TOPICS

section 1983

police misconduct

municipal liability

pleadings

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights

constitutional law

municipal liability

federal civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the complaint stated a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 claim against the Chesterfield County Police Department based on an allegedly unlawful arrest and detention.
2. Whether the complaint stated a § 1983 claim against Officer S.L. Morris where it did not connect the officer's personal actions to the alleged constitutional violation.
3. Whether the complaint stated an official-capacity claim against Officer Morris when the municipal claim against the police department was deficient.
4. Whether dismissal should occur immediately or Plaintiff should first be given an opportunity to show cause because she was proceeding pro se.

HOLDINGS

1. The complaint failed to state a § 1983 claim against the Chesterfield County Police Department because it did not allege that a municipal policy or custom caused the alleged constitutional injury.
2. The complaint failed to state a § 1983 claim against Officer S.L. Morris because it did not allege facts tying the officer's personal actions to the alleged constitutional deprivation.
3. An official-capacity claim against Officer Morris could not proceed because such a claim is effectively against the municipality, and the complaint did not state a valid municipal-liability claim.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“A pro se complaint should survive only when a plaintiff has set forth “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.””

“municipalities and other local government units such as police departments cannot be sued under § 1983 “for an injury inflicted solely by its employees or agents.””

“when the execution of a government’s policy or custom . . . inflicts the [plaintiff’s] injury.”

“proof of a single violation . . . cannot support an inference that the violation resulted from a municipally condoned custom of comparable practices.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff alleged that Chesterfield County police questioned, detained, and arrested her on July 10, 2024, in connection with an altercation at a gas station. She alleged that she was not involved in the altercation, had no reason to be suspected, and told an officer and jail deputies that she was not involved. She further alleged that she was physically mistreated and held against her will.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

On April 23, 2025, Plaintiff submitted an in forma pauperis application and proposed complaint. The court granted the application and directed that the complaint be filed, but determined during mandatory screening that the claims against the Chesterfield County Police Department and Officer S.L. Morris were deficient. Rather than dismissing immediately because of Plaintiff's pro se status, the court ordered Plaintiff to show cause why the action should not be dismissed.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007)
- Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 106 (1976)
- Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972)
- Monell v. Dep't of Soc. Servs., 436 U.S. 658, 694 (1978)
- Spell v. McDaniel, 824 F.2d 1380, 1391 (4th Cir. 1987)
- Kentucky v. Graham, 473 U.S. 159, 166 (1985)
- Vinnedge v. Gibbs, 550 F.2d 926, 928–29 (4th Cir. 1977)
- English v. Clarke, 90 F.4th 636, 649 (4th Cir. 2024)
- District of Columbia v. Wesby, 583 U.S. 48, 56 (2018)
- Atwater v. Lago Vista, 532 U.S. 318, 354 (2001)