

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF
VIRGINIA, ROANOKE DIVISION

Larry Allen Young, Jr. v. Chadwick Dotson, et al.

Young v. Dotson · No. 7:25cv00279 · Decided March 3, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Western District of Virginia granted the defendants’ Rule 12(b)(6) motion to dismiss Larry Allen Young, Jr.’s 42 U.S.C. § 1983 claim. Young alleged that prison officials violated the Eighth Amendment by placing him in a double cell despite his prior single-cell housing, history of sexual assault, and reported mental health issues. The court held that the complaint did not allege a specific known risk of harm, deliberate indifference to a serious mental health need, resulting injury, or a constitutional violation based solely on alleged violations of prison policy.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Western District of Virginia, Roanoke Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Pamela Meade Sargent
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Western District of Virginia, Roanoke Division
DECIDED	March 3, 2026
DOCKET	7:25cv00279
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendants moved to dismiss Young's 42 U.S.C. § 1983 complaint under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6). The parties consented to magistrate-judge jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 636(c), and the court granted the motion.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	On a Rule 12(b)(6) motion, the court accepts well-pleaded factual allegations as true and asks whether they plausibly show that the defendant is liable. Legal conclusions, labels, and conclusory statements are insufficient. Pro se pleadings are liberally construed but still must allege facts stating a legally sufficient claim.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished

PARTIES

Larry Allen Young, Jr. v. Chadwick Dotson, Israel Hamilton, Larry Fields, Slade, et al.

TOPICS

section 1983 prisoners rights motions to dismiss cruel and unusual punishment civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

prisoner civil rights constitutional litigation civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Young plausibly alleged an Eighth Amendment failure-to-protect claim based on being housed with a cellmate.
2. Whether Young plausibly alleged deliberate indifference to a serious mental-health need based on his housing assignment.
3. Whether alleged violations of VDOC classification, orientation, or housing policies state a constitutional claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

HOLDINGS

1. Young failed to state an Eighth Amendment failure-to-protect claim because he did not allege a specific known risk of serious harm posed by the cellmate or that any defendant actually knew of and disregarded such a risk.
2. Young failed to state a claim for deliberate indifference to a serious mental-health need because he did not allege a sufficiently serious mental-health need requiring particular treatment, a denied request for treatment, or defendants' knowledge of and disregard for an excessive risk.
3. Alleged failure to follow VDOC classification, orientation, or housing policies, standing alone, does not constitute a violation of the Constitution actionable under § 1983.
4. Section 1983 liability must be based on each defendant's own constitutional violation; respondeat superior does not apply.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“A plaintiff establishes ‘deliberate indifference’ by showing that the prison official ‘kn[ew] of and disregard[ed] an excessive risk to inmate health or safety.’”

“It not enough that [officials] should have recognized it; they actually must have perceived the risk.”

“Thus, ‘an official’s failure to alleviate a significant risk that he should have perceived but did not’ will not give rise to a claim under the Eighth Amendment.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Young, a Virginia Department of Corrections inmate, was transferred to Keen Mountain Correctional Center on October 31, 2024, and placed in a cell with a cellmate without receiving VDOC orientation or classification. He alleged that officials knew he had previously been housed alone, had been sexually assaulted by another inmate, and suffered anxiety, panic attacks, depression, and difficulty living with other inmates. He sought single-cell housing and related classification relief, but did not allege a specific known risk of harm from his particular cellmate, a denied request for specific mental-health treatment, or an injury resulting from double-cell housing.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Young filed a § 1983 complaint alleging that Virginia Department of Corrections officials violated his Eighth Amendment rights by housing him with a cellmate and failing to provide appropriate classification, orientation, and housing. The court previously severed his claims into five separate civil actions, leaving only Claim 1 in this case. After the parties consented to magistrate-judge jurisdiction, defendants moved to dismiss, and the court dismissed the remaining claim for failure to state a claim.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Francis v. Giacomelli, 588 F.3d 186, 192 (4th Cir. 2009)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678-79 (2009)
- Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007)
- Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007)
- Bracey v. Buchanan, 55 F. Supp. 2d 416, 421 (E.D. Va. 1999)
- Doe v. Broderick, 225 F.3d 440, 447 (4th Cir. 2000)
- Trulock v. Freeh, 275 F.3d 391, 402 (4th Cir. 2001)
- Vinnedge v. Gibbs, 550 F.2d 926, 928 (4th Cir. 1977)
- King v. Riley, King v. Riley, 76 F.4th 259, 269 (4th Cir. 2023)
- Riccio v. County of Fairfax, 907 F.2d 1459, 1469 (4th Cir. 1990)
- Shakka v. Smith, 71 F.3d 162, 165 (4th Cir. 1995)
- Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 832-34, 837-38, 844-45 (1994)
- Hudson v. Palmer, 468 U.S. 517, 526-27 (1984)
- Pressly v. Hutto, 816 F.2d 977, 979 (4th Cir. 1987)
- Davis v. Zahradnick, 600 F.2d 458, 460 (4th Cir. 1979)
- De’Lonta v. Angelone, 330 F.3d 630, 634 (4th Cir. 2003)
- Wilson v. Seiter, 501 U.S. 294, 298 (1991)
- Makdessi v. Fields, 789 F.3d 126, 133 (4th Cir. 2015)
- Grayson v. Peed, 195 F.3d 692, 695 (4th Cir. 1999)
- Danser v. Stansberry, 772 F.3d 340, 347 (4th Cir. 2014)

- Parrish v. Cleveland, 372 F.3d 294, 303 (4th Cir. 2004)
- Rich v. Bruce, 129 F.3d 336, 340 n.2 (4th Cir. 1997)
- Brown v. Harris, 240 F.3d 383, 390-91 (4th Cir. 2001)
- Reed v. Harris, 2022 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 21813, at *9 (E.D. Va. Feb. 7, 2022)
- Whaley v. Erickson, 339 F. App'x 619, 622 (7th Cir. 2009)
- Reid v. Polk, 2018 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 47197, at *20 (M.D. Fla. Mar. 22, 2018)
- Hunt v. Uphoff, 199 F.3d 1220, 1224 (10th Cir. 1999)
- Hutchins v. Havens, 2025 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 184228, at *10 (W.D. Mich. Sept. 19, 2025)
- Middleton v. Zych, 2012 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 143741, at *8 n.7 (W.D. Va. Oct. 4, 2012), aff'd, 514 F. App'x 401 (4th Cir. 2013)
- Oliver v. Powell, 250 F. Supp. 2d 593, 598 (E.D. Va. 2002)
- Bernadou v. Purnell, 836 F. Supp. 319, 326 (D. Md. 1993)

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