

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF
FLORIDA, JACKSONVILLE DIVISION

Richard Thomas Gardipee v. St. Johns County

Gardipee · No. 3:25-cv-697-MMH-LLL · Decided February 10, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Middle District of Florida dismissed Richard Thomas Gardipee’s pro se civil-rights action against St. Johns County without prejudice. The court held that the compensatory damages Gardipee sought were unavailable against the county for his alleged RLUIPA violation and directed the Clerk to enter judgment and close the case.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Middle District of Florida, Jacksonville Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Marcia Morales Howard
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Middle District of Florida, Jacksonville Division
DECIDED	February 10, 2026
DOCKET	3:25-cv-697-MMH-LLL
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Pro se prisoner civil-rights action filed in forma pauperis; the district court screened the complaint under the Prison Litigation Reform Act and dismissed it without prejudice.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court applied the PLRA screening standard and the Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6) standard, accepting well-pleaded factual allegations as true, drawing reasonable inferences in the plaintiff's favor, and liberally construing the pro se complaint while disregarding legal conclusions and conclusory allegations.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential
PARTIES	Richard Thomas Gardipee v. St. Johns County

TOPICS

prisoners rights

civil rights

section 1983

motions to dismiss

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

Civil rights

Federal civil procedure

Prisoner litigation

Religious exercise

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the complaint stated a claim subject to relief under the PLRA screening provisions.
2. Whether a RLUIPA claim against St. Johns County could proceed when the plaintiff sought only compensatory damages.
3. Whether the pro se complaint's request for compensatory damages could be liberally construed as a request for nominal damages.

HOLDINGS

1. The plaintiff could not obtain compensatory damages against the county for the alleged RLUIPA violation; the only relief he sought was therefore unavailable.
2. The complaint's request for \$14 million in compensatory damages could not be liberally construed as a request for nominal damages.
3. The action was dismissed without prejudice, with leave for Gardipee to refile claims under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 supported by sufficient factual allegations against a proper defendant.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“As Gardipee is not entitled to the only relief he seeks from St. Johns County, this case is due to be dismissed without prejudice to Gardipee’s right to refile his claims under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 with sufficient factual allegations to support a claim against a proper defendant if he elects to do so.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Gardipee alleged that, while incarcerated at the St. Johns County Detention Center, he requested a plant-based diet based on his Christian faith. He asserted that the facility required inmates to contact the chaplain electronically to request religious accommodations, that he made the request on June 7, 2025, and that the request was denied on June 13 after Deputy Sheriff Johnson asked him to identify his religion. Gardipee named St. Johns County as the defendant and sought \$14 million in compensatory damages.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Gardipee filed a complaint alleging that St. Johns County denied him a vegetarian religious diet while he was incarcerated at the St. Johns County Detention Center. He sought only \$14 million in compensatory damages. On screening under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) and 1915A, the court dismissed the action without prejudice because compensatory damages were unavailable against the county under RLUIPA and the complaint did not request nominal damages.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Bilal v. Driver, 251 F.3d 1346, 1349 (11th Cir. 2001)
- Battle v. Cent. State Hosp., 898 F.2d 126, 129 (11th Cir. 1990)
- Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 327-28 (1989)
- Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25, 32 (1992)
- Mehmood v. Guerra, 783 F. App'x 938, 940 (11th Cir. 2019)
- McNamara v. Gov't Emps. Ins. Co., 30 F.4th 1055, 1060-61 (11th Cir. 2022)
- Salvato v. Miley, 790 F.3d 1286, 1295 (11th Cir. 2015)
- Bingham v. Thomas, 654 F.3d 1171, 1175 (11th Cir. 2011) (per curiam)
- Richardson v. Johnson, 598 F.3d 734, 737 (11th Cir. 2010) (per curiam)
- Zatler v. Wainwright, 802 F.2d 397, 401 (11th Cir. 1986)
- Porter v. White, 483 F.3d 1294, 1306 n.10 (11th Cir. 2007)
- Randall v. Scott, 610 F.3d 701, 705, 709 (11th Cir. 2010)
- Mitchell v. Farcass, 112 F.3d 1483, 1490 (11th Cir. 1997)
- Alba v. Montford, 517 F.3d 1249, 1252 (11th Cir. 2008)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678, 680 (2009)
- Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555, 570 (2007)
- Jackson v. BellSouth Telecomms., 372 F.3d 1250, 1262-63 (11th Cir. 2004)
- Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 93 (2007) (per curiam)
- Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519 (1972)
- Tannenbaum v. United States, 148 F.3d 1262, 1263 (11th Cir. 1998)
- Campbell v. Air Jamaica Ltd., 760 F.3d 1165, 1168-69 (11th Cir. 2014)
- GJR Invs., Inc. v. Cnty. of Escambia, 132 F.3d 1359, 1369 (11th Cir. 1998)
- Brown v. Tony, No. 0:23-cv-60033-KMM, 2023 WL 7482788, at *4 (S.D. Fla. July 25, 2023), adopted by 2023 WL 6973026 (S.D. Fla. Oct. 23, 2023)
- Hathcock v. Cohen, 287 F. App'x 793, 798 n.6 (11th Cir. 2008)
- Koepke v. Jacksonville Sheriff's Dep't, No. 3:19-cv-924-J-39JBT, 2020 WL 1083712, at *2 (M.D. Fla. Mar. 6, 2020)
- Honors v. Judd, No. 8:10-cv-22-T-33AEP, 2011 WL 3498287, at *6 (M.D. Fla. Aug. 10, 2011)
- Williams v. Langford, No. 2:13-cv-315-FtM-38CM, 2015 WL 163226, at *7 (M.D. Fla. Jan. 12, 2015)
- Carey v. Piphus, 435 U.S. 247, 266-67 (1978)
- Smith v. Barrow, No. CV 311-044, 2012 WL 6519541, at *5 (S.D. Ga. Nov. 9, 2012), report and recommendation adopted as modified, 2012 WL 6522020 (S.D. Ga. Dec. 13, 2012)
- Stone v. First Union Corp., 371 F.3d 1305, 1310 (11th Cir. 2004)

