

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF KANSAS

Paul Runnels v. State of Kansas

No. 25-1104-EFM-TJJ (D. Kan. Feb. 12, 2026) · No. 25-1104-EFM-TJJ · Decided February 12, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of Kansas addresses the State of Kansas’s motion to dismiss Paul Runnels’s Title VII claims for sex discrimination, retaliation, and race discrimination. The court holds that Title VII permits suit against the State and its agencies, denies dismissal of the retaliation claim, and dismisses the sex discrimination and race discrimination claims for insufficient factual allegations. The court also denies the plaintiff’s informal request for leave to amend.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Kansas
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Eric F. Melgren
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Kansas
DECIDED	February 12, 2026
DOCKET	25-1104-EFM-TJJ
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The State of Kansas moved to dismiss Runnels's First Amended Complaint under Federal Rules of Civil Procedure 12(b)(1) and 12(b)(6).
STANDARD OF REVIEW	On a Rule 12(b)(1) motion, the plaintiff bears the burden of establishing subject-matter jurisdiction, and the court must dismiss claims over which it lacks jurisdiction. On a Rule 12(b)(6) motion, the court accepts well-pleaded factual allegations as true, disregards legal conclusions, and determines whether the complaint states a facially plausible claim for relief.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential
PARTIES	Paul Runnels v. State of Kansas

TOPICS

- title vii
- retaliation
- sexual harassment
- racial discrimination
- motions to dismiss

PRACTICE AREAS

employment law

civil rights

federal civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the Eleventh Amendment deprived the court of subject-matter jurisdiction over Runnels's Title VII claims against the State of Kansas and its agencies.
2. Whether Runnels plausibly stated a Title VII hostile-work-environment sexual-harassment claim.
3. Whether Runnels plausibly stated a Title VII sex-discrimination disparate-treatment claim.
4. Whether Runnels plausibly stated a Title VII retaliation claim.
5. Whether Runnels plausibly stated a Title VII race-discrimination claim.
6. Whether Runnels's conclusory request for leave to amend warranted permission to file another amended complaint.

HOLDINGS

1. The court had subject-matter jurisdiction because Congress abrogated state sovereign immunity for Title VII discrimination and retaliation claims, and Runnels alleged that he was an employee of the State or its agencies.
2. Runnels failed to plausibly state a hostile-work-environment sexual-harassment claim because he alleged no facts supporting that the harassment was sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the terms or conditions of employment.
3. Runnels failed to plausibly state a Title VII disparate-treatment sex-discrimination claim because his allegations that female employees were treated more favorably after similar misconduct accusations were conclusory and did not identify the misconduct, timing, or similarly situated comparators.
4. Runnels plausibly stated a Title VII retaliation claim by alleging that he complained of sexual harassment, was removed from and barred from working at Larned State Hospital, thereby losing overtime opportunities, and suffered that action within days of his complaint.
5. Runnels failed to plausibly state a Title VII race-discrimination claim because his allegation that white employees accused of misconduct were treated more favorably was conclusory and lacked factual detail.
6. The court denied the request for leave to amend because the single-sentence request did not state grounds for amendment and did not constitute a proper motion.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“A claim is facially plausible if the plaintiff pleads facts sufficient for the court to reasonably infer that the defendant is liable for the alleged misconduct.”

“Threadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Runnels, an African American male employed by the Kansas Department of Corrections, volunteered at Larned State Hospital for overtime pay. He alleged that a female coworker sexually harassed him, that he reported the harassment, and that the coworker then accused him of misconduct. Within days of his complaint, the State removed him from Larned State Hospital and barred him from volunteering for overtime, while allegedly treating female and white employees accused of similar misconduct more favorably.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Runnels filed a Title VII employment discrimination action on May 21, 2025, and filed his First Amended Complaint on August 21, 2025. The State moved to dismiss on September 4, 2025. The court granted the motion in part and denied it in part, dismissing the sex-discrimination and race-discrimination claims while allowing the retaliation claim to proceed and denying the request for leave to amend.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- In re Syngenta AG MIR 162 Corn Litig., 61 F.4th 1126, 1170 (10th Cir. 2023)
- Siloam Springs Hotel, LLC v. Century Sur. Co., 906 F.3d 926, 931 (10th Cir. 2018)
- Port City Props. v. Union Pac. R.R. Co., 518 F.3d 1186, 1189 (10th Cir. 2008)
- Crumpacker v. Kan. Dep't of Hum. Res., 338 F.3d 1163, 1168-72 (10th Cir. 2003)
- Bd. of Trs. of Univ. of Ala. v. Garrett, 531 U.S. 356, 363 (2001)
- Fitzpatrick v. Bitzer, 427 U.S. 445, 449 n.2 (1976)
- Khalik v. United Air Lines, 671 F.3d 1188, 1192-93 (10th Cir. 2012)
- McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green, 411 U.S. 792 (1973)
- Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 556, 570 (2007)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678-79 (2009)
- Robbins v. Oklahoma, 519 F.3d 1242, 1248 (10th Cir. 2008)
- Dick v. Phone Directories Co., Inc., 397 F.3d 1256 (10th Cir. 2005)
- Delsa Brooke Sanderson v. Wyo. Highway Patrol, 976 F.3d 1164, 1174 (10th Cir. 2020)
- Oncale v. Sundowner Offshore Servs., Inc., 523 U.S. 75, 80 (1998)
- Ricci v. DeStefano, 557 U.S. 557, 577 (2009)
- Barlow v. C.R. England, Inc., 703 F.3d 497, 505 (10th Cir. 2012)
- Salguero v. City of Clovis, 366 F.3d 1168, 1175 (10th Cir. 2004)
- Plotke v. White, 405 F.3d 1092, 1100 (10th Cir. 2005)
- Bekkem v. Wilkie, 915 F.3d 1258, 1275 (10th Cir. 2019)
- Twigg v. Hawker Beechcraft Corp., 659 F.3d 987, 998 (10th Cir. 2011)
- Anderson v. Coors Brewing Co., 181 F.3d 1171, 1178 (10th Cir. 1999)
- Little v. Gray Media Grp., Inc., 790 F. Supp. 3d 1195, 1239 (D. Kan. 2025)

- Hinds v. Sprint/United Mgmt. Co., 523 F.3d 1187, 1204 (10th Cir. 2008)
- Calderon v. Kan. Dep't of Soc. & Rehab. Servs., 181 F.3d 1180, 1187 (10th Cir. 1999)

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