

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
WISCONSIN

Jonathan Sellers v. Kevin Carr, Cindy O'Donnell, Daniel Coate, and
Warden Michael Meisner

Sellers v. Carr, No. 24-CV-637-JPS (E.D. Wis. Mar. 11, 2026) · No. 24-CV-637-JPS · Decided March 11, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin granted Defendants’ motion for summary judgment in Jonathan Sellers’s action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act. The court held that Sellers failed to provide admissible evidence showing that Defendants substantially burdened his religious exercise as a Nation of Gods and Earths adherent. The action was dismissed with prejudice.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin
WRITING FOR THE COURT	J. P. Stadtmueller
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin
DECIDED	March 11, 2026
DOCKET	24-CV-637-JPS
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff brought a pro se action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act. After screening, the court allowed First Amendment free-exercise and RLUIPA claims to proceed. Defendants moved for summary judgment.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Summary judgment is appropriate when there is no genuine dispute as to any material fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. The court viewed facts and reasonable inferences in the light most favorable to the nonmovant and did not weigh evidence or determine witness credibility.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district-court order; nonprecedential and persuasive only
PARTIES	Jonathan Sellers v. Kevin Carr, Cindy O'Donnell, Daniel Coate, Warden Michael Meisner

TOPICS

summary judgment

free exercise clause

prisoners rights

section 1983

civil rights

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights

constitutional law

prisoner litigation

religious freedom

summary judgment

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Defendants substantially burdened Sellers's religious exercise in violation of the First Amendment Free Exercise Clause.
2. Whether Defendants substantially burdened Sellers's religious exercise in violation of RLUIPA.
3. Whether Sellers could proceed at summary judgment on an Establishment Clause theory that prison officials forced NGE adherents to attend Islamic services or favored other religions.

HOLDINGS

1. Defendants were entitled to summary judgment because Sellers failed to provide admissible evidence showing that they substantially burdened his religious exercise. Requiring him to submit a DOC-2075 accommodation form and informing him that the chapel lacked NGE materials did not establish a substantial burden, and the undisputed evidence showed that NGE materials were not blanket-banned and that the Department was not required to purchase religious literature.
2. Sellers could not proceed on the asserted Establishment Clause theory because the screening order did not permit that claim, the complaint did not contain discernible allegations supporting it, and Sellers presented no admissible evidence to support it.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"Under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 56, the "court shall grant summary judgment if the movant shows that there is no genuine dispute as to any material fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law."'" (at 6)

"Just to be clear about where [the Holt decision] leaves the substantial burden analysis: any prohibition of requested religious property will constitute a substantial burden on a religious exercise, thus placing the burden on the prison to justify that prohibition." (at 8)

"In sum the undisputed facts before the Court do not support a finding that Defendants substantially burdened Plaintiff's ability to practice his religion." (at 11)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Sellers, an inmate at Fox Lake Correctional Institution, sought to practice and obtain materials relating to the Nation of Gods and Earths, including observance of specified honor days and access to religious literature. In October 2023, prison staff informed him that the chapel had no NGE materials and directed him to submit a DOC-2075 form concerning requested accommodations; Sellers did not submit that form during the relevant period. Wisconsin corrections policy had ceased classifying NGE as a security-threat group in late 2022, and

NGE-related materials were no longer categorically prohibited, although the chapel did not possess NGE publications and the Department did not purchase religious literature. Sellers later submitted a religious-diet form in April 2024, but the request sought additional information rather than being denied.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Sellers, an inmate at Fox Lake Correctional Institution, filed suit alleging that Wisconsin Department of Corrections officials denied or restricted religious accommodations and materials related to the Nation of Gods and Earths. The court screened the complaint and permitted a First Amendment free-exercise claim against Coate, O'Donnell, and Carr and a RLUIPA claim against Meisner. After the parties briefed Defendants' summary-judgment motion, the court granted the motion on the merits and dismissed the action with prejudice.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- *Boss v. Castro*, 816 F.3d 910, 916 (7th Cir. 2016)
- *Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc.*, 477 U.S. 242, 248 (1986)
- *Bridge v. New Holland Logansport, Inc.*, 815 F.3d 356, 360 (7th Cir. 2016)
- *Berry v. Chi. Transit Auth.*, 618 F.3d 688, 691 (7th Cir. 2010)
- *Edgewood High Sch. of the Sacred Heart, Inc. v. City of Madison, Wisconsin*, 95 F.4th 1080, 1090 (7th Cir. 2024)
- *Vision Church v. Village of Long Grove*, 468 F.3d 975, 996 (7th Cir. 2006)
- *O'Lone v. Shabazz*, 482 U.S. 342, 348 (1987)
- *Tarpley v. Allen County*, 312 F.3d 895, 898 (7th Cir. 2002)
- *Garner v. Muenchow*, 715 F. App'x 533, 536 (7th Cir. 2017)
- *Turner v. Safley*, 482 U.S. 78, 89 (1987)
- *West v. Radtke*, 48 F.4th 836, 844 (7th Cir. 2022)
- *Blake v. West*, No. 21-CV-493-JDP, 2025 WL 915791, at *5 (W.D. Wis. Mar. 26, 2025)
- *Holt v. Hobbs*, 574 U.S. 352, 357, 360-61 (2015)
- *Tanksley v. Litscher*, No. 15-cv-126-jdp, 2017 WL 3503377, at *6 (W.D. Wis. Aug. 15, 2017), *aff'd*, 723 F. App'x 370 (7th Cir. 2018)
- *Obriecht v. Raemisch*, 517 F.3d 489, 493 (7th Cir. 2008)
- *Gonzales v. Brevard*, 531 F. Supp. 2d 1019, 1022 (W.D. Wis. 2008)
- *Henderson v. Frank*, 293 F. App'x 410, 413-14 (7th Cir. 2008)
- *Cutter v. Wilkinson*, 544 U.S. 709, 720 n.8 (2005)
- *Greybuffalo v. Wall*, No. 15-CV-8-BBC, 2015 WL 5093340, at *1 (W.D. Wis. Aug. 28, 2015)
- *Schlemm v. Frank*, No. 11-cv-272-WMC, 2014 WL 2591879, at *9 (W.D. Wis. June 10, 2014), *aff'd* in relevant part, *Schlemm v. Wall*, 784 F.3d 362, 363 (7th Cir. 2015)

- Westefer v. Snyder, 422 F.3d 570, 577 (7th Cir. 2005)
- Reynolds v. Haseleu, No. 24-CV-187, 2025 WL 1807417, at *2 (E.D. Wis. July 1, 2025)
- Hurst v. Hantke, 634 F.3d 409, 412 (7th Cir. 2011)

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