

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Leonard Scarbrough v. City of Sacramento Sheriff’s Department, et
al.

Scarbrough · No. 2:25-cv-1897-CKD P · Decided November 21, 2025

SUMMARY

The court grants Leonard Scarbrough’s application to proceed in forma pauperis and screens his prisoner civil rights complaint. The order finds cognizable excessive-force claims under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against Deputies Gonzalez and Rozo, but finds no other claims adequately stated against the remaining defendants. Plaintiff is permitted either to proceed on the identified claims or to file an amended complaint within 30 days.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Carolyn K. Delaney
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	November 21, 2025
DOCKET	2:25-cv-1897-CKD P
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Prisoner civil-rights action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 screened under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A. The court granted plaintiff leave to proceed in forma pauperis and found cognizable excessive-force claims against Deputies Gonzalez and Rozo, while declining to recognize the other claims as currently pleaded.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Mandatory screening under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A; the court must dismiss claims that are frivolous or malicious, fail to state a claim, or seek monetary relief from an immune defendant.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown; district court screening order with no reporter citation
PARTIES	Leonard Scarbrough v. City of Sacramento Sheriff’s Department, Chief Deputy Sergeant Jim Cooper, Deputy Sheriff Gonzalez, Deputy Sheriff Rozo

TOPICS

section 1983

prisoners rights

civil rights

municipal liability

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

prisoner civil rights

constitutional torts

municipal liability

federal civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the complaint stated cognizable constitutional excessive-force claims against Deputies Gonzalez and Rozo.
2. Whether the complaint stated a personal-liability or supervisory-liability claim against Sergeant Cooper.
3. Whether the complaint adequately pleaded failure-to-train or municipal-liability claims against the Sacramento County Sheriff's Department.
4. Whether the complaint stated a Bane Act claim without alleging compliance with California's Government Claims Act.
5. Whether plaintiff satisfied the requirements to proceed in forma pauperis.

HOLDINGS

1. The complaint stated cognizable excessive-force claims against Deputies Gonzalez and Rozo. The applicable constitutional provision depends on whether plaintiff was a convicted inmate or a pretrial detainee: the Eighth Amendment applies to a convicted inmate, while the Fourteenth Amendment applies to a pretrial detainee.
2. The complaint did not state an excessive-force claim against Sergeant Cooper because it failed to allege facts showing his personal involvement, and a supervisor cannot be held liable solely because of a supervisory position.
3. The complaint did not state failure-to-train or municipal-liability claims because its conclusory allegations did not adequately allege deliberate indifference, a policy, custom, or practice, or a pattern of similar constitutional violations that was the moving force behind the alleged deprivation.
4. The complaint did not state a Bane Act claim because it did not allege compliance with California's Government Claims Act.
5. Plaintiff satisfied the requirements to proceed in forma pauperis, and the motion was granted.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"Plaintiff may proceed on the excessive force claims against these defendants or plaintiff may file an amended complaint under the guidelines set forth below." (at 1)

"If plaintiff chooses to proceed on the claims stated, the court will construe the choice as a request to voluntarily dismiss the additional claims and defendants pursuant to Rule 41(a)(1)(i) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure." (at 3)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff alleged that deputies at the Sacramento County Jail repeatedly used force against him, including slamming him to the ground, twisting his arm and ankle, placing a knee in his back, and using handcuffs in a manner that injured his wrist. He further alleged that Deputy Rozo slammed him to the ground and chipped his tooth, while Deputy Gonzalez twisted his arm during separate incidents. Plaintiff also alleged that Sergeant Cooper and the Sheriff's Department failed to train deputies and that the defendants violated California's Bane Act.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff, a jail inmate proceeding without counsel, filed a complaint alleging excessive force, failure to train, municipal liability, and violations of California's Bane Act. The matter was referred to the magistrate judge under Local Rule 302. On screening, the court granted in forma pauperis status, permitted plaintiff either to proceed on the excessive-force claims against Gonzalez and Rozo or to file an amended complaint, and required an election within thirty days.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Hudson v. McMillian, 503 U.S. 1, 6-7 (1992)
- Graham v. Connor, 490 U.S. 386, 395 n.10 (1989)
- Simmons v. Navajo County, 609 F.3d 1011, 1020-21 (9th Cir. 2010)
- Rodriguez v. County of Los Angeles, 891 F.3d 776, 798 (9th Cir. 2018)
- City of Canton v. Harris, 489 U.S. 378, 388 (1989)
- Dougherty v. City of Covina, 654 F.3d 892, 900 (9th Cir. 2011)
- Monell v. Department of Social Services, 436 U.S. 658, 694 (1978)
- Hyde v. City of Willcox, 23 F.4th 863, 875 (9th Cir. 2022)
- Mohsin v. California Department of Water Resources, 52 F. Supp. 3d 1006, 1017 (E.D. Cal. 2014)
- Noll v. Carlson, 809 F.2d 1446, 1448-49 (9th Cir. 1987)
- George v. Smith, 507 F.3d 605, 607 (7th Cir. 2007)
- Loux v. Rhay, 375 F.2d 55, 57 (9th Cir. 1967)

OPINION

Leonard Scarbrough v. City of Sacramento Sheriff's Department, et al.

PER CURIAM.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

9 FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

DEPARTMENT, et al., 15 Defendants. 16 17 Plaintiff Leonard Scarbrough, a jail inmate, proceeds without counsel and requests to 18 proceed in forma pauperis. This matter was referred to the undersigned by Local Rule 302. See 28 19 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1). For screening purposes, the complaint states claims under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 20 against Deputy Gonzalez and Deputy Rozo for allegedly using unconstitutionally excessive force 21 against plaintiff. No other claims are stated. Plaintiff may proceed on the excessive force claims 22 against these defendants or plaintiff may file an amended complaint under the guidelines set forth 23 below. 24 I. In Forma Pauperis 25 Plaintiff's declaration in support of the motion to proceed in forma pauperis makes the 26 showing required by 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a). The motion is granted. By separate order, plaintiff will 27 be assessed an initial partial filing fee in accordance with the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 28 1915(b)(1). The order will direct the appropriate agency to collect the initial partial filing fee 1 from plaintiff's trust account and forward it to the Clerk of the Court. Thereafter, plaintiff will be 2 obligated for monthly payments of twenty percent of the preceding month's income credited to 3 plaintiff's prison trust account. These payments will be forwarded by the appropriate agency to 4 the Clerk of the Court each time the amount in plaintiff's account exceeds \$10.00 until the filing 5 fee is paid in full. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(2). 6 II. Screening Requirement 7 The court is required to screen complaints brought by prisoners seeking relief against a 8 governmental entity or officer or employee of a governmental entity. 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(a). The 9 court must dismiss a complaint or portion thereof if the prisoner has raised claims that are legally 10 "frivolous or malicious," that fail to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or that seek 11 monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b)(1), (2). 12 III. Allegations in the Complaint 13 Plaintiff alleges that on March 14, 2025, Deputy Haven and another deputy brought an 14 inmate to plaintiff's cell at the Sacramento County Jail. (ECF No. 1 at 3.) Plaintiff stated he did 15 not want to be housed with the inmate and felt homicidal for himself and the inmate. (Id.) An 16 unspecified deputy became aggressive, slammed plaintiff to the ground, and started twisting 17 plaintiff's arm and using handcuffs to shatter his wrist. (Id.) More unspecified deputies came and 18 twisted plaintiff's ankle and arm and a deputy put a knee in plaintiff's back. (Id.) 19 Plaintiff was moved to the third floor and asked Deputies Rozo, Gonzalez and Kat for 20 blankets. (ECF No. 1 at 4.) After grabbing the bedding, plaintiff asked Deputy Gonzalez "are you 21 refusing to sign my grievance[?]" (Id.) Deputy Gonzalez stated, "don't fucking look at me" and 22 Deputy Rozo slammed plaintiff to the ground, chipping plaintiff's tooth. (Id.) Deputy Gonzalez 23 began twisting plaintiff's arm trying to break it. (Id.) The following day, plaintiff asked Deputy 24 Gonzalez for a tablet and had another incident with Deputy Gonzalez trying to twist plaintiff's 25 arm and shove him as he was putting on handcuffs. (Id.) Plaintiff's braid was yanked out. (Id.) 26

The complaint identifies four defendants: County of Sacramento Sheriff's Department, 27 Chief Deputy Sergeant Jim Cooper, Deputy Sheriff Gonzalez, and Deputy Sheriff Rozo. (ECF 28 No. 1 at 2.) In claim one, plaintiff alleges the defendants violated his Eighth Amendment rights 1 by using excessive force. (Id. at 3.) In claim two, plaintiff alleges Sergeant Cooper and the 2 Sheriff's Department failed to properly train the deputies who assaulted him. (Id. at 6.) In claim 3 three, plaintiff alleges a violation of California's Tom Bane Civil Rights Act ("Bane Act") for 4 "retaliation" and specifically in connection with the incidents involving Deputy Gonzalez. (Id. at 5 7.) Plaintiff seeks money damages and equitable relief. (Id. at 8.) 6 IV. Discussion 7 Plaintiff's allegations against Deputy Gonzalez and Deputy Rozo state excessive force 8 claims. If plaintiff was a convicted jail inmate, those claims are cognizable under the Eighth 9 Amendment. See *Hudson v. McMillian*, 503 U.S. 1, 6-7 (1992). If plaintiff was a pretrial 10 detainee, those claims are cognizable under the Fourteenth Amendment. See *Graham v. Connor*, 11 490 U.S. 386, 395 n.10 (1989). The complaint does not state an excessive force claim against 12 defendant Sergeant Jim Cooper because plaintiff does not allege specific facts demonstrating the 13 sergeant's personal involvement. See *Simmons v. Navajo County*, 609 F.3d 1011, 1020-21 (9th 14 Cir. 2010). Sergeant Cooper cannot be held liable solely based on holding a supervisory position 15 at the prison. See *Rodriguez v. County of Los Angeles*, 891 F.3d 776, 798 (9th Cir. 2018) (a 16 supervisor may be liable in his individual capacity for his own culpable action or inaction in the 17 training, supervision, or control of his subordinates; for his acquiescence in the constitutional 18 deprivation; or for conduct that showed a reckless or callous indifference to the rights of others). 19 The complaint does not state a claim based on alleged failure to train. To prevail on such a 20 claim, a plaintiff must prove the failure to train amounts to deliberate indifference to the rights of 21 those with whom the untrained officials come into contact. See *City of Canton v. Harris*, 489 U.S. 22 378, 388 (1989). In order to state a claim for municipal liability against the County of Sacramento 23 for the conduct of the sheriff's department, plaintiff must allege facts showing (1) he was 24 deprived of a constitutional right, (2) the County has a policy, custom or practice which amounted 25 to deliberate indifference to that constitutional right, and (3) the policy, custom or practice was 26 the moving force behind the constitutional violation. See *Dougherty v. City of Covina*, 654 F.3d 27 892, 900 (9th Cir. 2011). Plaintiff's conclusory allegations of failure to train and the incidents of 28 excessive force involving plaintiff do not adequately set forth a pattern of similar constitutional 1 violations and do not state a municipal liability claim or give adequate notice of a failure to train 2 claim against Sergeant Cooper as a supervising official. See *Monell v. Department of Social 3 Services*, 436 U.S. 658, 694 (1978); *Hyde v. City of Willcox*, 23 F.4th 863, 875 (9th Cir. 2022). 4 The complaint also does not state any claim under the Bane Act because it contains no 5 facts suggesting plaintiff complied with California's Government Claims Act ("GCA"). No state 6 claim for money or damages may be brought against a public entity unless those claims have been 7 presented for review and rejected by a notice issued or a failure to act.

See Cal. Gov't Code § 900.8 et seq. Compliance with the GCA is required before plaintiff may sue a state entity or its officers under the California Constitution or the Bane Act. See *Mohsin v. California Dep't of Water Res.*, 1052 F. Supp. 3d 1006, 1017 (E.D. Cal. 2014) (dismissing state law claims for failure to allege compliance with GCA). V. Leave to Amend Plaintiff may proceed on the excessive force claims against Deputy Gonzalez and Deputy Rozo or plaintiff may file an amended complaint. See *Noll v. Carlson*, 809 F.2d 1446, 1448-49 (9th Cir. 1987). Plaintiff must complete and return to the court the attached notice along with any optional amended complaint. This opportunity to amend is not for the purposes of adding new and unrelated claims. See *George v. Smith*, 507 F.3d 605, 607 (7th Cir. 2007). Local Rule 220.18 requires that an amended complaint be complete without reference to any prior pleading. See *Loux v. Rhay*, 375 F.2d 55, 57 (9th Cir. 1967). An amended complaint should be titled "First Amended Complaint" and reference the case number. If plaintiff chooses to proceed on the claims stated, the court will construe the choice as a request to voluntarily dismiss the additional claims and defendants pursuant to Rule 41(a)(1)(i) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. Then the court will send plaintiff the necessary forms for service of the complaint on defendants Gonzalez and Rozo. VI. Plain Language Summary for Pro Se Party The following information is meant to explain this order in plain English. This summary is not intended as legal advice. Your allegations state excessive force claims against defendants Gonzalez and Rozo. You may proceed on those claims or file an amended complaint. You must complete the attached notice and return it to the court within 30 days from the date of this order, along with any optional amended complaint. VII. Conclusion In accordance with the above, IT IS ORDERED as follows: 1. Plaintiff's motion to proceed in forma pauperis (ECF No. 4) is GRANTED. 2. Plaintiff's complaint states excessive force claims against defendants Gonzalez and Rozo; plaintiff may proceed on those claims or file an amended complaint. 3. Within thirty (30) days of the date of this order, plaintiff shall complete and return the attached Notice of Election form along with any optional amended complaint. 4. Failure to respond to this order will result in a recommendation that this action be dismissed for failure to obey a court order and failure to prosecute. Dated: November 21, 2025 / ae / a Ly a

UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

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LEONARD SCARBROUGH, 2:25-cv-1897-CKD P

Plaintiff,

v. NOTICE OF ELECTION

CITY OF SACRAMENTO SHERIFF'S

DEPARTMENT,

8 Defendants 9

10 Check one: 11 12 _____ Plaintiff wants to proceed on the complaint as screened with excessive
force claims 13 against defendants Gonzalez and Roza. Plaintiff understands that by choosing to
proceed 14 on these claims, the court will construe this as a request to voluntarily dismiss the other
15 claims and defendants pursuant to Rule 41(a)(1)(A)(i) of the Federal Rules of Civil 16
Procedure. 17 18 _____ Plaintiff wants to amend the complaint. 19 20 21 22

DATED: _____

23 Plaintiff 24

25 26 27 28