

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Seymour v. Ledbetter

Case No. 1:22-cv-00989-JLT-CDB (PC) (E.D. Cal. June 26, 2025) (findings and recommendations) · No. 1:22-cv-00989-JLT-CDB (PC) · Decided June 27, 2025

SUMMARY

This document contains findings and recommendations by the United States District Court for the Eastern District of California regarding Defendant Ledbetter’s motion for summary judgment. The action concerns a prisoner’s claims under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 for First Amendment retaliation and Eighth Amendment failure to protect. The magistrate judge recommends granting the motion, finding insufficient evidence of retaliatory motive or deliberate indifference to a substantial risk of harm.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	June 27, 2025
DOCKET	1:22-cv-00989-JLT-CDB (PC)
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff, a state prisoner proceeding pro se and in forma pauperis under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, brought First Amendment retaliation and Eighth Amendment failure-to-protect claims. Defendant moved for summary judgment. The magistrate judge recommended granting the motion and entering judgment for Defendant, subject to objections and review by the assigned district judge.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Summary judgment is proper 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 must view the opposing party's evidence favorably and draw reasonable inferences in that party's favor, but conclusory allegations, speculation, and unsupported metaphysical doubt do not create a genuine dispute.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential
PARTIES	Aaron D. Seymour v. Ledbetter

TOPICS

summary judgment

section 1983

prisoners rights

first amendment

constitutional law

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights litigation

prisoner civil rights

federal civil procedure

constitutional litigation

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Plaintiff presented sufficient evidence of retaliatory motive and lack of a legitimate correctional goal to create a genuine dispute on his First Amendment retaliation claim.
2. Whether Plaintiff presented sufficient evidence that Defendant knew of and disregarded an objectively substantial risk of serious harm to Plaintiff to create a genuine dispute on his Eighth Amendment failure-to-protect claim.
3. Whether Defendant was entitled to qualified immunity.

HOLDINGS

1. Defendant was entitled to summary judgment on Plaintiff's First Amendment retaliation claim because Plaintiff offered only speculation and conclusory allegations that Defendant's comment was motivated by Plaintiff's protected conduct, and the evidence showed that the challenged conduct reasonably advanced legitimate correctional goals.
2. Defendant was entitled to summary judgment on Plaintiff's failure-to-protect claim because Plaintiff failed to establish an objectively substantial risk of serious harm or that Defendant knew of and disregarded such a risk.
3. The court did not reach qualified immunity because Defendant was entitled to judgment on the merits of both constitutional claims.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Summary judgment is appropriate when it is demonstrated that there “is no genuine dispute as to any material fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law.”” (at 2)

“A claim for First Amendment retaliation in the prison context requires: (1) that a state actor took some adverse action against the plaintiff (2) because of (3) the plaintiff’s protected conduct, and that such action (4) chilled the plaintiff’s exercise of his First Amendment rights, and (5) “the action did not reasonably advance a legitimate correctional goal.”” (at 7)

“A failure to protect claim under the Eighth Amendment requires a showing that “the official [knew] of and disregard[ed] an excessive risk to inmate ... safety.”” (at 8)

“At most, Defendant’s comment to Davis during the disciplinary hearing amounts to mere negligence or gross negligence—neither of which arises to an Eighth Amendment violation.” (at 23)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

During a February 10, 2022 prison disciplinary hearing conducted by Defendant Ledbetter, Plaintiff admitted refusing a housing assignment. Plaintiff alleged that Ledbetter made a statement or joke to Plaintiff's witness that effectively labeled Plaintiff a snitch in retaliation for Plaintiff's discussion of another lawsuit concerning prison water, placing Plaintiff at risk from other inmates. The undisputed evidence showed that the witness understood the comment as a joke, Plaintiff was not attacked, Plaintiff reported no ongoing safety or enemy concerns when interviewed after filing a grievance, and Ledbetter had no knowledge of any substantial risk to Plaintiff's safety.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The action proceeded on Plaintiff's First Amendment retaliation claim and Eighth Amendment failure-to-protect claim against Defendant Ledbetter. Defendant filed a motion for summary judgment, Plaintiff opposed it with a brief but no compliant response to Defendant's statement of undisputed facts, and Defendant replied. The magistrate judge deemed the properly supported facts admitted under Local Rule 260(b), considered any contrary facts supported by Plaintiff's verified complaint or evidence, and recommended granting summary judgment on both claims.

DISPOSITION

other

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

The magistrate judge recommended that the assigned district judge grant Defendant's motion for summary judgment, direct the Clerk to enter judgment in Defendant's favor, and close the case. The parties were given fourteen days to object under 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1) and Local Rule 304(b).

CASES CITED

- Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317, 322 (1986)
- Matsushita Electric Industrial Co. v. Zenith Radio Corp., 475 U.S. 574, 586-87 & n.11 (1986)
- Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc., 477 U.S. 242, 248, 255 (1986)
- T.W. Electric Service, Inc. v. Pacific Electric Contractors Association, 809 F.2d 626, 630-31 (9th Cir. 1987)
- Wool v. Tandem Computers, Inc., 818 F.2d 1433, 1436 (9th Cir. 1987)
- Richards v. Nielsen Freight Lines, 602 F. Supp. 1224, 1244-45 (E.D. Cal. 1985), *aff'd*, 810 F.2d 898, 902 (9th Cir. 1987)
- Rhodes v. Robinson, 408 F.3d 559, 566-68 (9th Cir. 2005)
- Brodheim v. Cry, 584 F.3d 1262, 1269, 1271 (9th Cir. 2009)
- McCollum v. California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, 647 F.3d 870, 882-83 (9th Cir. 2011)
- Wood v. Yordy, 753 F.3d 899, 905 (9th Cir. 2014)
- Labatad v. Corrections Corporation of America, 714 F.3d 1155, 1160 (9th Cir. 2013)
- Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 832-34, 837, 842-43, 847 (1994)
- Hearn v. Terhune, 413 F.3d 1036, 1040 (9th Cir. 2005)
- Gibson v. County of Washoe, 290 F.3d 1175, 1187 (9th Cir. 2002)

- Wilson v. Seiter, 501 U.S. 294, 297 (1991)
- Foster v. Runnels, 554 F.3d 807, 812 (9th Cir. 2009)
- Valandingham v. Bojorquez, 866 F.2d 1135, 1138-39 (9th Cir. 1989)
- Cafasso, U.S. ex rel. v. General Dynamics C4 Systems, Inc., 637 F.3d 1047, 1061 (9th Cir. 2011)
- Soremekun v. Thrifty Payless, Inc., 509 F.3d 978, 984 (9th Cir. 2007)
- Nelson v. Pima Community College, 83 F.3d 1075, 1081-82 (9th Cir. 1996)
- Pratt v. Rowland, 65 F.3d 802, 807-08 (9th Cir. 1995)
- Sandin v. Conner, 515 U.S. 472, 482 (1995)
- Berg v. Kincheloe, 794 F.2d 457, 459 (9th Cir. 1986)
- Beard v. Banks, 548 U.S. 521, 527 (2006)
- Jones v. Blanas, 393 F.3d 918, 923 (9th Cir. 2004)
- Harris v. County of Orange, 682 F.3d 1126, 1131-32 (9th Cir. 2012)
- Nevada Department of Corrections v. Greene, 648 F.3d 1014, 1018 (9th Cir. 2011)
- Sepulveda v. Lee, No. CV 10-1705-JLT, 2017 WL 4247970, at *3 (E.D. Cal. Sept. 22, 2017)
- Williams v. Wood, 223 F. App'x 670, 671, 2007 WL 654223, at *1 (9th Cir. 2007)
- Wilkerson v. Wheeler, 772 F.3d 834, 839 (9th Cir. 2014)