

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Jason Thor Leonard v. California State Prison Sacramento, et al.

Leonard v. CSP Sacramento · No. 2:22-cv-01231 WBS SCR P · Decided November 19, 2025

SUMMARY

This document contains findings and recommendations by a magistrate judge of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of California concerning defendants’ motion for summary judgment in a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 action. The plaintiff alleged that correctional officers violated the Eighth Amendment by failing to protect him from being struck by a homemade spear thrown by another inmate. The magistrate judge recommends granting summary judgment for the defendants, concluding that the plaintiff failed to present sufficient evidence that the defendants were deliberately indifferent to a substantial risk of serious harm.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Sean C. Riordan
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	November 19, 2025
DOCKET	2:22-cv-01231 WBS SCR P
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff brought an action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 alleging that correctional officers violated the Eighth Amendment by failing to protect him from being stabbed by another inmate. The remaining defendants moved for summary judgment and alternatively asserted qualified immunity. The magistrate judge issued findings and recommendations recommending that the motion be granted.
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. In evaluating the motion, the court must believe the opposing party's evidence and draw reasonable inferences in that party's favor, but unsupported speculation and conclusory allegations do not create a genuine dispute. Qualified immunity requires consideration of whether the facts show a constitutional violation and whether the right was clearly established.

PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential; findings and recommendations
PARTIES	Jason Thor Leonard v. California State Prison Sacramento, A. Britton, S. Bartlett

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether defendants were entitled to summary judgment on Leonard's Eighth Amendment failure-to-protect claim because the evidence did not establish that they were subjectively aware of and deliberately indifferent to a substantial risk of serious harm.
2. Whether defendants would be entitled to qualified immunity even if the evidence created a triable issue concerning subjective awareness.

HOLDINGS

1. The evidence created a genuine dispute as to whether the broken cell window presented an objectively substantial risk of serious harm, but Leonard failed to create a genuine dispute that Bartlett or Britton actually knew of the broken window and drew the inference that it posed a substantial risk to him. Summary judgment should therefore be granted to defendants.
2. Even assuming a triable issue existed as to whether defendants violated Leonard's Eighth Amendment rights, defendants would be entitled to qualified immunity because it was not clearly established that redirecting an inmate past a cell with a broken window, in order to avoid an immediate gassing threat, violated the Constitution under the circumstances.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“A prison official acts with deliberate indifference only if he “knows of and disregards an excessive risk to inmate health and safety; the official must both be aware of facts from which the inference could be drawn that a substantial risk of serious harm exists, and he must also draw the inference.”” (at 12)

“If a person should have been aware of the risk, but was not, then the person has not violated the Eighth Amendment, no matter how severe the risk.” (at 15)

“it is not sufficient that Farmer clearly states the general rule that prison officials cannot deliberately disregard a substantial risk of serious harm to an inmate; . . . in addition, it is relevant that neither Farmer nor subsequent authorities has fleshed out at what point a risk of inmate assault becomes sufficiently substantial for Eighth Amendment purposes.” (at 17)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Leonard was housed in the Psychiatric Services Unit at California State Prison, Sacramento, where inmate Gulbranson had a history of gassing staff and spearing staff through cell windows. On June 30, 2020, Officer Lujan discovered that Gulbranson's cell window was partially shattered and had a small hole, but defendants Bartlett and Britton stated they were not informed of the damage and did not observe it. Approximately two hours later, while escorting Leonard, defendants redirected him past Gulbranson's cell to avoid another inmate's threat to throw bodily fluids; Gulbranson then threw a homemade spear through the hole and struck Leonard's arm. Leonard asserted that defendants knew of the danger, but his opposition was unverified and lacked evidentiary support.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Leonard proceeded pro se and in forma pauperis on a first amended complaint alleging Eighth Amendment failure-to-protect claims against correctional officers Britton and Bartlett. The claims survived screening, and the defendants moved for summary judgment. After reviewing the filings and ordering defendants to determine whether additional video footage existed under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 56(e)(4), the magistrate judge concluded that plaintiff failed to establish a genuine dispute concerning defendants' subjective awareness of a substantial risk and recommended granting summary judgment and closing the case, subject to objections to the assigned district judge.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Thomas v. Ponder, 611 F.3d 1144, 1150 (9th Cir. 2010)
- Jones v. Blanas, 393 F.3d 918, 923 (9th Cir. 2004)
- Martinez v. Stanford, 323 F.3d 1178, 1184 (9th Cir. 2003)
- In re Oracle Corp. Securities Litigation, 627 F.3d 376, 387 (9th Cir. 2010)
- Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317, 322-25 (1986)
- Matsushita Electric Industrial Co. v. Zenith Radio Corp., 475 U.S. 574, 586-87 (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 (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)
- Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 833-34, 837, 842-43, 847 (1994)
- Labatad v. Correctional Corporation of America, 714 F.3d 1155, 1160-61 (9th Cir. 2013)
- Brown v. Hughes, 894 F.2d 1533, 1537 (11th Cir. 1990)
- Williams v. Wood, 223 F. App'x 670, 671 (9th Cir. 2007)
- Becker v. Cowan, No. 3:07-cv-1571 RBB, 2008 WL 802933, at *11 (S.D. Cal. Mar. 21, 2008)
- Lemire v. California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation, 726 F.3d 1062, 1075-78 (9th Cir. 2013)
- Castro v. County of Los Angeles, 833 F.3d 1060, 1067-68 (9th Cir. 2016) (en banc)

- *Harrington v. Scribner*, 785 F.3d 1299, 1304 (9th Cir. 2015)
- *Coverdell v. Department of Social & Health Services, State of Washington*, 834 F.2d 758, 762 (9th Cir. 1987)
- *Motoyama v. Hawaii, Department of Transportation*, 864 F. Supp. 2d 965, 977 (D. Haw. 2012), *aff'd*, 584 F. App'x 399 (9th Cir. 2014)
- *Soremekun v. Thrifty Payless, Inc.*, 509 F.3d 978, 984 (9th Cir. 2007)
- *Federal Trade Commission v. Stefanchik*, 559 F.3d 924, 929 (9th Cir. 2009)
- *Frary v. County of Marin*, 81 F. Supp. 3d 811, 828 (N.D. Cal. 2015)
- *Dean v. City of Fresno*, 546 F. Supp. 2d 798, 813-14 (E.D. Cal. 2008)
- *Banks v. Deschutes County*, No. CIV. 06-6299-TC, 2009 WL 2366546, at *2-3 (D. Or. July 31, 2009), *aff'd*, 408 F. App'x 94 (9th Cir. 2011)
- *Ruiz v. Walker*, No. C 06-5559 SI (PR), 2008 WL 512710, at *7 (N.D. Cal. Feb. 25, 2008), *aff'd sub nom. Ruiz v. Sotelo*, 338 F. App'x 665 (9th Cir. 2009)
- *County of Sacramento v. Lewis*, 523 U.S. 833, 842 n.5 (1998)
- *Peck v. Montoya*, 51 F.4th 877, 887 (9th Cir. 2022)
- *Tolan v. Cotton*, 572 U.S. 650, 655-56 (2014) (*per curiam*)
- *Estate of Ford v. Ramirez-Palmer*, 301 F.3d 1043, 1050-51 (9th Cir. 2002)
- *Wilk v. Neven*, 956 F.3d 1143, 1150 (9th Cir. 2020)
- *Reece v. Goose*, 60 F.3d 487, 490 (8th Cir. 1995)
- *Martinez v. Ylst*, 951 F.2d 1153 (9th Cir. 1991)

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