

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF
PENNSYLVANIA

Terrell Hale v. B. Stroble

Hale v. Stroble · No. No. 4:25-CV-01900 · Decided February 12, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania dismissed Terrell Hale’s Bivens claims against federal mailroom clerk B. Stroble concerning the handling of incoming legal mail. The court held that the First Amendment claim presented a new Bivens context and that alternative remedies and other special factors counseled against extending Bivens; it also dismissed official-capacity claims as barred by sovereign immunity and denied leave to amend as futile.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Matthew W. Brann
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania
DECIDED	February 12, 2026
DOCKET	No. 4:25-CV-01900
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Pro se federal prisoner brought an individual- and official-capacity Bivens action seeking money damages based on the alleged opening, copying, and delayed delivery of incoming legal mail. The district court screened the complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A and dismissed it with prejudice for failure to state a claim and, as to the official-capacity claim, for seeking monetary relief from an immune defendant.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	At screening under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b)(1), the court applied the Rule 12(b)(6) plausibility standard, accepting well-pleaded factual allegations as true and drawing reasonable inferences in the plaintiff's favor while disregarding legal conclusions. The court also liberally construed the pro se complaint.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished_nonprecedential
PARTIES	Terrell Hale v. B. Stroble

TOPICS

civil rights

first amendment

sovereign immunity

motions to dismiss

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PRACTICE AREAS

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether a prisoner's First Amendment claim concerning the handling of incoming legal mail presents a new Bivens context for which a damages remedy may be implied.
2. Whether the availability of the Bureau of Prisons' Administrative Remedy Program and other special factors preclude extending Bivens to the asserted First Amendment prison-mail claim.
3. Whether Hale's official-capacity Bivens claim is barred by sovereign immunity and failure to establish subject-matter jurisdiction.
4. Whether Hale should be granted leave to amend or prospective injunctive relief after his transfer to another federal institution.

HOLDINGS

1. A prisoner's claim that a federal prison official opened, copied, and delayed incoming legal mail presents a new Bivens context because the Supreme Court has not recognized an implied damages remedy for that type of First Amendment claim and the claim differs from the three recognized Bivens contexts.
2. The court declined to extend Bivens because special factors counseled against implying a damages remedy, principally the availability of the Bureau of Prisons' Administrative Remedy Program as an alternative remedial structure.
3. Hale's official-capacity Bivens claim must be dismissed because a suit against a federal officer in an official capacity is effectively a suit against the United States, which is protected by sovereign immunity absent an express waiver.
4. Leave to amend was properly denied as futile because Hale sought an unwarranted extension of Bivens and his official-capacity claim was barred by sovereign immunity.
5. Any claim for prospective injunctive relief against Stroble was moot because Hale had been transferred from FCI Allenwood Low.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"Because Hale fails to state a claim for relief and granting leave to amend would be futile, the Court will dismiss this Bivens action with prejudice."

"These three cases—Bivens, Davis, and Carlson—represent the only instances in which the Court has approved of an implied damages remedy under the Constitution itself."

"In sum, Hale's First Amendment prison-mail claim would extend Bivens to a new context, yet special factors counsel against such an extension."

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Hale, formerly incarcerated at FCI Allenwood Low, alleged that mailroom clerk B. Stroble opened and copied incoming legal mail, refused to allow Hale to sign for it, and delayed notifying him of the mail for approximately two weeks. Hale sought money damages under Bivens and purported to sue Stroble in both individual and official capacities. Hale was later transferred to FCI Ashland in Kentucky.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Hale initially filed a civil rights complaint asserting unrelated claims against several officials at FCI Allenwood Low. The court determined that the medical-care claims were properly joined but that the claims against Stroble and Getz were unrelated, and severed the matter into separate actions. In this action, Hale's remaining claim was against Stroble concerning incoming legal mail. The court dismissed the complaint with prejudice and denied leave to amend as futile.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Bivens v. Six Unknown Named Agents of Federal Bureau of Narcotics, 403 U.S. 388, 397 (1971)
- Davis v. Passman, 442 U.S. 228, 248-49 (1979)
- Carlson v. Green, 446 U.S. 14, 16 n.1 (1980)
- Ziglar v. Abbasi, 582 U.S. 120, 130-31, 135-47 (2017)
- Egbert v. Boule, 596 U.S. 482, 492 (2022)
- Hernandez v. Mesa, 589 U.S. 93, 102-03 (2020)
- Mack v. Yost, 968 F.3d 311, 317-21 (3d Cir. 2020)
- Muniz v. United States, 149 F.4th 256, 263-65 (3d Cir. 2025)
- Kalu v. Spaulding, 113 F.4th 311, 327-28 (3d Cir. 2024)
- Fisher v. Hollingsworth, 115 F.4th 197, 205 (3d Cir. 2024)
- Kentucky v. Graham, 473 U.S. 159, 165-66 (1985)
- Treasurer of N.J. v. U.S. Department of Treasury, 684 F.3d 382, 395-96 (3d Cir. 2012)
- United States v. Mitchell, 445 U.S. 535, 538 (1980)
- Chinchello v. Fenton, 805 F.2d 126, 130 n.4 (3d Cir. 1986)
- Tucker v. Secretary, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 588 F. App'x 110, 115 (3d Cir. 2014)
- Grayson v. Mayview State Hospital, 293 F.3d 103, 109-10, 114 (3d Cir. 2002)
- O'Brien v. U.S. Federal Government, 763 F. App'x 157, 159 (3d Cir. 2019)
- Allah v. Seiverling, 229 F.3d 220, 223 (3d Cir. 2000)
- Scheuer v. Rhodes, 416 U.S. 232, 236 (1974)
- Nami v. Fauver, 82 F.3d 63, 66 (3d Cir. 1996)

- Phillips v. County of Allegheny, 515 F.3d 224, 229 (3d Cir. 2008)
- Mayer v. Belichick, 605 F.3d 223, 230 (3d Cir. 2010)
- Pension Benefit Guaranty Corp. v. White Consolidated Industries, 998 F.2d 1192, 1196 (3d Cir. 1993)
- Connelly v. Lane Construction Corp., 809 F.3d 780, 787 (3d Cir. 2016)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 675, 679, 681 (2009)
- Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007)
- Dooley v. Wetzel, 957 F.3d 366, 374 (3d Cir. 2020)
- Shane v. Fauver, 213 F.3d 113, 115 (3d Cir. 2000)
- Centifanti v. Nix, 865 F.2d 1422, 1431 (3d Cir. 1989)
- Sutton v. Rasheed, 323 F.3d 236, 248 (3d Cir. 2003)
- Abdul-Akbar v. Watson, 4 F.3d 195, 197 (3d Cir. 1993)
- Hale v. Greene, No. 4:25-cv-01242, Doc. 10 at 4-5 (M.D. Pa. Sept. 23, 2025)

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