

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

In re CIM-SQ Transfer Cases

No. 5:20-cv-06326-EJD (N.D. Cal. May 12, 2025) · No. 5:20-cv-06326-EJD · Decided May 12, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of California granted a prisoner-plaintiff’s motion to reopen his case concerning the May 2020 transfer of prisoners from California Institution for Men to San Quentin State Prison during the COVID-19 pandemic. The court found cognizable Eighth Amendment, California Bane Act, negligent infliction of emotional distress, and Rehabilitation Act claims, ordered service, and stayed the case for purposes other than service.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Edward J. Davila
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
DECIDED	May 12, 2025
DOCKET	5:20-cv-06326-EJD
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The court considered a pro se prisoner-plaintiff’s motion to reopen a previously dismissed civil-rights action, screened the complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, determined that several claims were cognizable, ordered service, and stayed the consolidated matter for all purposes other than service.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, the court must identify cognizable claims or dismiss the complaint, or any portion of it, if it is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim, or seeks monetary relief from an immune defendant. Pro se pleadings are liberally construed, and a complaint must contain sufficient factual matter to state a plausible claim for relief.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown; district-court order with no reporter citation and no stated precedential status.

TOPICS

prisoners rights

section 1983

civil procedure

service of process

cruel and unusual punishment

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights

prisoner litigation

constitutional law

health law

civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the plaintiff's motion to reopen should be granted after he submitted an application to proceed in forma pauperis.
2. Whether the complaint stated cognizable claims under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A against the individual defendants for Eighth Amendment deliberate indifference.
3. Whether the complaint stated a cognizable claim under California Civil Code section 52.1.
4. Whether the complaint stated a cognizable Rehabilitation Act claim against the State of California, CDCR, and San Quentin State Prison.
5. Whether the complaint stated a cognizable negligent infliction of emotional distress claim under California law.

HOLDINGS

1. The motion to reopen was granted because it was accompanied by an application to proceed in forma pauperis, and the case was screened under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A.
2. The allegations concerning the May 2020 prisoner transfer stated cognizable Eighth Amendment claims against the identified individual defendants for deliberate indifference to plaintiff's health and safety needs.
3. The complaint, liberally construed, stated a cognizable Bane Act claim because it alleged that defendants acted with reckless disregard for plaintiff's constitutional rights.
4. The complaint stated a cognizable Rehabilitation Act claim against the State of California, CDCR, and San Quentin State Prison.
5. The complaint stated a cognizable negligent infliction of emotional distress claim under California law.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The Court must identify cognizable claims or dismiss the complaint, or any portion of the complaint, if the complaint “is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted,” or “seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief.”” (at 2)

“Specific facts are not necessary; the statement need only give the defendant fair notice of what the . . . claim is and the grounds upon which it rests.” (at 2)

“Under California law, “there is no independent tort of negligent infliction of emotional distress.”” (at 6)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The plaintiff, a California prisoner, alleged that more than 100 inmates, some infected with COVID-19, were transferred from the California Institution for Men to San Quentin State Prison in May 2020. He alleged that prison officials failed to test or screen prisoners, implement distancing measures, isolate transferred prisoners, provide adequate protective equipment, or follow public-health recommendations, after which COVID-19 cases at San Quentin increased substantially. Plaintiff alleged that he contracted COVID-19 in July 2020 and that his health conditions increased his risk of serious illness.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The plaintiff filed a § 1983 complaint concerning the transfer of prisoners from the California Institution for Men to San Quentin State Prison during the COVID-19 pandemic. The action was previously dismissed for failure to file an application to proceed in forma pauperis or pay the correct filing fee. After plaintiff moved to reopen and submitted an in forma pauperis application, the court granted reopening, screened the complaint, ordered service, and directed that the case remain stayed except for service because it is part of consolidated transfer cases.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- *Balistreri v. Pacifica Police Department*, 901 F.2d 696, 699 (9th Cir. 1990)
- *Erickson v. Pardus*, 127 S. Ct. 2197, 2200 (2007)
- *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 127 S. Ct. 1955, 1964-65, 1974 (2007)
- *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S.
- *Leadsinger, Inc. v. BMG Music Publishing*, 512 F.3d 522, 532 (9th Cir. 2008)
- *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S.
- *Reese v. County of Sacramento*, 888 F.3d 1030, 1035, 1040, 1045 (9th Cir. 2018)
- *Venegas v. County of Los Angeles*, 153 Cal. App. 4th 1230, 1239 (2007)
- *United States v. Reese*, 2 F.3d 870, 885 (9th Cir. 1993)
- *Bonner v. Lewis*, 857 F.2d 559, 562-63 (9th Cir. 1988)
- *Armstrong v. Wilson*, 124 F.3d 1019, 1022-23 (9th Cir. 1997)
- *Pugliese v. Dillenberg*, 346 F.3d 937, 937-38 (9th Cir. 2003) (per curiam)
- *Potter v. Firestone Tire & Rubber Co.*, 6 Cal. 4th 965, 984-85 (1993)
- *Lawson v. Superior Court*, 180 Cal. App. 4th 1372, 1389-90 (2010)
- *Giraldo v. Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation*, 168 Cal. App. 4th 231, 250 (2008)

OPINION

1 2 3 4 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT 5 NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA 6
SAN JOSE DIVISION 7 IN RE CIM-SQ TRANSFER CASES Case No. 5:20-cv-06326-EJD 8

ORDER REOPENING CASE; 9 This Document Relates To: VACATING JUDGMENT; OF
SERVICE 10 24-cv-03569; Morales v. State of California Dkt. No. 215 11 et al. 12 13
INTRODUCTION 14 Plaintiff, a California prisoner, filed this pro se complaint pursuant to 42
U.S.C. § 1983.

15 Dkt. No. 1 in 24-cv-03569. Plaintiff alleged that defendants violated his constitutional rights by
16 transferring over 100 inmates, some of whom were infected with COVID-19, from the
California 17 Institution for Men (CIM) to San Quentin State Prison (SQSP)1 in May 2020.

The Court 18 previously dismissed plaintiff's action for failing to file an application to proceed in
forma 19 pauperis or to pay the correct filing fee. See Dkt. No. 8 in 24-cv-03569. Plaintiff has
filed a 20 motion to reopen the case, accompanied by an application to proceed in forma pauperis.
Dkt. 21 Nos. 215, 216 in Case No. 20-cv-06326. Plaintiff's motion to reopen the case is granted,
and the 22 case is now before the Court for screening pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(a).

Service of the 23 complaint will be ordered. Plaintiff will be granted leave to proceed in forma
pauperis by separate 24 order. 25 This case has been consolidated with cases in this district related
to the 2020 prisoner 26 transfer and related to the first case filed, No. 5:20-cv-06326-EJD, which
now has the caption "In 27 1 Re CIM-SQ Transfer Cases." Pro se prisoner cases that are part of
the consolidated matter are 2 stayed except for the purposes of service.

Service shall therefore proceed in plaintiff's case as 3 ordered below, but the case will remain
stayed for all other purposes. The docket for Case No. 24- 4 cv-03569 and all other individual
dockets have been closed. If plaintiff wishes to file any 5 motions, he must file them in Case No.
5:20-cv-06326-EJD and include his original case number, 6 No. 24-cv-03569, on the left side of
the heading.

7 STANDARD OF REVIEW 8 Federal courts must engage in a preliminary screening of cases in
which prisoners seek 9 redress from a governmental entity or officer or employee of a
governmental entity. 28 U.S.C. § 10 1915A(a).

The Court must identify cognizable claims or dismiss the complaint, or any portion of 11 the
complaint, if the complaint "is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief 12
may be granted," or "seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief." Id.
13 § 1915A(b). Pro se pleadings must be liberally construed. *Balistreri v. Pacifica Police Dep't*,
901 14 F.2d 696, 699 (9th Cir.

1990). 15 Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8(a)(2) requires only "a short and plain statement of the
16 claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief." "Specific facts are not necessary; the 17
statement need only give the defendant fair notice of what the.... claim is and the grounds upon 18
which it rests." *Erickson v. Pardus*, 127 S. Ct. 2197, 2200 (2007) (citations omitted).

Although to 19 state a claim a complaint “does not need detailed factual allegations,... a plaintiff’s obligation to 20 provide the grounds of his entitle[ment] to relief requires more than labels and conclusions, and a 21 formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action will not do.... Factual allegations must 22 be enough to raise a right to relief above the speculative level.” *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 23 127 S. Ct.

1955, 1964-65 (2007) (citations omitted). A complaint must proffer “enough facts to 24 state a claim for relief that is plausible on its face.” *Id.* at 1974. 25 To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege two elements: (1) that a 26 right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States was violated, and (2) that the alleged 27 violation was committed by a person acting under the color of state law.

West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 1 If a court dismisses a complaint for failure to state a claim, it should “freely give 2 leave” to amend “when justice so requires.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 15(a)(2). A court has discretion to 3 deny leave to amend due to “undue delay, bad faith or dilatory motive on the part of the movant, 4 repeated failure to cure deficiencies by amendment previously allowed, undue prejudice to the 5 opposing party by virtue of allowance of the amendment, [and] futility of amendment.” 6 *Leadsinger, Inc. v. BMG Music Pub.*, 512 F.3d 522, 532 (9th Cir.

2008). 7 LEGAL CLAIMS 8 Plaintiff’s complaint alleges as follows: defendants were involved in the decision to 9 transfer over 100 prisoners, some of whom were infected with COVID-19, from CIM to SQSP in 10 May 2020. Dkt. No. 1 at 18-19. Defendants then failed to take adequate safety precautions 11 before, during, and after the transfer, including failing to test the transferring prisoners or screen 12 them for symptoms at the appropriate times, failing to implement distancing measures on the 13 transfer buses, and failing to test and isolate the transferred prisoners upon arrival.

Id. at 19-20. 14 Over the course of three weeks, SQSP went from having no cases of COVID to 499 cases, and by 15 late July, SQSP had more than 2,000 prisoner cases and 26 prisoners had died from the virus. *Id.* 16 at 19, 23. Then defendants failed to follow the recommendations of a Marin County public health 17 official to mitigate spread, and that there was “a grave lack of personal protective equipment and 18 masks at San Quentin... even though masks and PPE were easily obtainable.” *Id.* at 20-21.

19 Defendants failed to follow the recommendations of a group of public health experts, who toured 20 SQSP at the request of federal receiver Clark Kelso, to release or transfer prisoners and avoid 21 reliance on punitive housing to quarantine the sick. *Id.* at 21-22. Further, defendants refused 22 offers by the Innovative Genomics Institute at Berkeley and by a research laboratory at UCSF 23 Medical Center to provide free COVID testing.

Id. at 22. 24 Plaintiff alleges he became infected with COVID in July 2020. Id. at 32. 25 Plaintiff names the following defendants: 26 1. The State of California 27 2. California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (“CDCR”) 1 4. Ralph Diaz, former secretary of CDCR 2 5. Estate of Robert S. Tharratt, former Medical Director of CDCR 3 6. Ronald Davis, Warden of SQSP 4 7.

Ronald Broomfield, Acting Warden of SQSP 5 8. Clarence Cryer, Chief Executive Officer of SQSP 6 9. Alison Pachynski, Chief Medical Executive of SQSP 7 10. Shannon Garrigan, Chief Physician and Surgeon of SQSP 8 11. Louie Escobell, Health Care Chief Executive Officer of CIM 9 12. Muhammad Farooq, Chief Medical Executive for CIM 10 13. Kirk Torres, Chief Physician and Surgeon for CIM 11 14.

Does 1 through 20. 12 Dkt. No. 1 at 4. Plaintiff sues all defendants who are people in their individual capacities. Id. 13 Plaintiff alleges that defendants Diaz, Estate of Tharratt, Davis, Broomfield, Cryer, 14 Pachynski, Garrigan, Escobell, Farooq, Torres, and Does 1-20 violated his rights under the Eighth 15 Amendment by being deliberately indifferent, either directly or via supervisory liability, to his 16 medical and safety needs, and violated his rights under California Civil Code section 52.1.

Dkt. 17 No. 1 at 34-41. Plaintiff also brings a negligent infliction of emotional distress claim against those 18 defendants. Id. at 45. 19 Plaintiff alleges that defendants State of California, CDCR, and San Quentin violated his 20 rights under the Rehabilitation Act. Id. at 43. 21 Plaintiff seeks declaratory relief, compensatory damages, punitive damages, and costs.

Id. 22 at 46-47. 23 ANALYSIS 24 A. Eighth Amendment Claim 25 The allegations regarding the May 2020 transfer of CIM inmates into SQSP state 26 cognizable Eighth Amendment claims against defendants Diaz, Estate of Tharratt, Davis, 27 Broomfield, Cryer, Pachynski, Garrigan, Escobell, Farooq, and Torres. *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 1 faces substantial risk of serious harm and disregards that risk by failing to take reasonable steps to 2 abate it).

3 B. Bane Act 4 California Civil Code section 52.1, the Bane Act, “protects individuals from conduct aimed 5 at interfering with rights that are secured by federal or state law, where the interference is carried 6 out ‘by threats, intimidation or coercion’.” *Reese v. Cnty. of Sacramento*, 888 F.3d 1030, 1040 7 (9th Cir. 2018) (quoting *Venegas v. County of Los Angeles*, 153 Cal.App.4th 1230, 1239 (2007)).

8 A defendant must have “specific intent” to violate the plaintiff’s rights. “But it is not necessary 9 for the defendants to have been ‘thinking in constitutional or legal terms at the time of the 10 incidents, because a reckless disregard for a person’s constitutional rights is evidence of a specific 11 intent to deprive that person of those rights’.” Id. at 1035, 1045 (quoting *United States v. Reese*, 2 12 F.3d 870, 885 (9th Cir.

1993)) (triable issue as to specific intent where the defendant deputy 13 sheriffs, responding to a 911 call about a gunshot and a man with a knife, fired at the plaintiff as 14 he answered the door with a knife). Here, liberally construed, plaintiff has stated a cognizable 15 claim that defendants acted with reckless disregard for his constitutional rights, meeting the 16 elements of the Bane Act.

17 C. Rehabilitation Act 18 The elements of a § 504 Rehabilitation Act claim are that: (1) the plaintiff is a handicapped 19 person under the Act; (2) he is otherwise qualified; (3) the relevant program receives federal 20 financial assistance; and (4) the defendants impermissibly discriminated against him on the basis 21 of the handicap. *Bonner v. Lewis*, 857 F.2d 559, 562-63 (9th Cir.

1988). The Act applies to state 22 prisons receiving federal financial assistance. *Armstrong v. Wilson*, 124 F.3d 1019, 1022-23 (9th Cir. 1997), and a state's acceptance of federal funds may waive sovereign immunity. See *Pugliese v. Dillenberg*, 346 F.3d 937, 937-38 (9th Cir. 2003) (per curiam). 25 Here, plaintiff alleges that he has disabilities consisting of a heart condition, diabetes, 26 obesity, advanced age, and Hispanic heritage.

Dkt. No. 1 at 44. Neither race nor age is a 27 disability for purposes of the Rehabilitation Act, but liberally construed, his health conditions may 1 California, CDCR, and SQSP receive federal assistance and funds. He alleges that these 2 defendants: 3 [W]ere required to make reasonable accommodations for [his] disabilities, such as providing additional enhanced PPE, providing 4 legally required N-95 respirators, changing the prison environment, sanitation and deep cleaning of the prison, eradicating vermin from 5 the housing unit, black mold remediation, single cell housing to allow for social distancing, enforcing social distancing and masking 6 mandates, and following well-known public health directives, Orders, and advice... to properly address the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak 7 at San Quentin.

8 Id. Plaintiff alleges that defendants violated the Rehabilitation Act by failing to accommodate his 9 disabilities and "subject[ing him] to even a greater risk of contracting and dying from COVID-19 10 than his non-disabled inmate cohorts." Id. at 45. Liberally construed, plaintiff has stated a 11 cognizable Rehabilitation Act claim against defendants the State of California, CDCR, and SQSP.

12 D. Negligent Infliction of Emotional Distress 13 Plaintiff has also stated a cognizable state-law claim for negligent infliction of emotional 14 distress. Under California law, "there is no independent tort of negligent infliction of emotional 15 distress." *Potter v. Firestone Tire & Rubber Co.*, 6 Cal. 4th 965, 984 (1993). A negligent 16 infliction of emotional distress claim is only available where the "defendant has assumed a duty to 17 plaintiff in which the emotional condition of the plaintiff is an object," and "recovery is available 18 only if the emotional distress arises the defendant's breach of some other legal duty and the 19 emotional distress is proximately caused by that breach of duty." Id. at 985.

Here, defendants 20 have a duty to plaintiff as a prisoner under state tort law. California “[c]ase law holds that ‘there is 21 a special relationship between jailer and prisoner, imposing on the former a duty of care to the 22 latter’.” *Lawson v. Superior Ct.*, 180 Cal. App. 4th 1372, 1389–90 (2010) (quoting *Giraldo v. 23 Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation*, 168 Cal. App.

4th 231, 250 (2008)). Plaintiff alleges 24 that the emotional distress arose out of defendants’ breach of their duty to him by exposing him to 25 COVID-19. 26 CONCLUSION 27 1. Plaintiff’s motion to reopen the case (Dkt. No. 215) is granted.

The Clerk shall 1 2. Plaintiff has stated the following cognizable claims against defendants Diaz, Estate 2 of Tharratt, Davis, Broomfield, Cryer, Pachynski, Garrigan, Escobell, Farooq, and Torres: 3 violation of the Eighth Amendment by deliberate indifference to his health and safety needs; 4 California Civil Code section 52.1; and negligent infliction of emotional distress.

5 3. Plaintiff has stated the following cognizable claims against defendants the State of 6 California, CDCR, and SQSP: violation of the Rehabilitation Act. 7 4. The Court ORDERS that service shall proceed by the United States Marshal 8 Service (“USMS”) on the State of California through the Office of the Attorney General. 9 5.

The Court orders that service on the following defendants shall proceed under the 10 California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation’s (“CDCR”) e-service program for civil 11 rights cases from prisoners in the CDCR’s custody: 12 a. CDCR 13 b. SQSP 14 c. Ralph Diaz, former secretary of CDR 15 d. Estate of Robert S. Tharratt, former Medical Director of CDR 16 e. Ronald Davis, Warden of SQSP 17 f. Ronald Broomfield, Acting Warden of SQSP 18 g. Clarence Cryer, Chief Executive Officer of SQSP 19 h. Alison Pachynski, Chief Medical Executive of SQSP 20 i. Shannon Garrigan, Chief Physician and Surgeon of SQSP 21 j. Louie Escobell, Health Care Chief Executive Officer of CIM 22 k. Muhammad Farooq, Chief Medical Executive for CIM 23 l. Kirk Torres, Chief Physician and Surgeon for CIM 24 In accordance with the program, the clerk is directed to serve on the CDCR via email the 25 following documents: the operative complaint (Dkt.

No. 1 in 24-cv-03569), this Order of Service, 26 a CDCR Report of E-Service Waiver form, and a summons. The clerk also shall serve a copy of 27 this order on the plaintiff. 1 No later than 40 days after service of this order via email on the CDCR, the CDCR shall 2 provide the court a completed CDCR Report of E-Service Waiver advising the court which 3 defendant(s) listed in this order will be waiving service of process without the need for service by 4 the USMS and which defendant(s) decline to waive service or could not be reached.

The CDCR 5 also shall provide a copy of the CDCR Report of E-Service Waiver to the California Attorney 6 General’s Office which, within 21 days, shall file with the Court a waiver of service of process for 7 the defendant(s) who are waiving service. 8 Upon receipt of the CDCR Report of E-

Service Waiver, the clerk shall prepare for each defendant who has not waived service according to the CDCR Report of E-Service Waiver a USM-285 Form.

The clerk shall provide to the USMS the completed USM-285 forms and copies of this order, the summons and the operative complaint for service upon each defendant who has not waived service. The clerk also shall provide to the USMS a copy of the CDCR Report of E-Service Waiver. 6. All defendants are cautioned that Rule 4 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure requires them to cooperate in saving unnecessary costs of service of the summons and complaint.

Pursuant to Rule 4, if defendants, after being notified of this action and asked by the Court, on behalf of plaintiff, to waive service of the summons, fail to do so, they will be required to bear the cost of such service unless good cause can be shown for their failure to sign and return the waiver form. 7. All communications by plaintiff with the Court must be served on defendants' counsel by mailing a true copy of the document to defendants' counsel.

The Court may disregard any document which a party files but fails to send a copy of to his opponent. Until defendants' counsel has been designated, plaintiff may mail a true copy of the document directly to defendants, but once defendants are represented by counsel, all documents must be mailed to counsel rather than directly to defendants.

Plaintiff is responsible for prosecuting this case. Plaintiff must promptly keep the Court informed of any change of address and must comply with the Court's orders in a timely] to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(b). Plaintiff must file a notice of change of address in every 2 || pending case every time he is moved to a new facility. 9. Any motion for an extension of time must be filed no later than the deadline sought 4 || to be extended and must be accompanied by a showing of good cause.

Plaintiff ☐ cautioned that 5 || he must include the case name and case number for this case on any document he submits to the 6 || Court for consideration in this case. 7 10. The case will remain stayed for all purposes other than service of the complaint on 8 defendants. 9 IT IS SO ORDERED. 10 || Dated: May 12, 2025 1] a (12 5 EDWARD J. DAVILA 13 United States District Judge (44 16 17 Oo Z 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28