

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
MISSOURI, NORTHERN DIVISION

Brian Peak v. Paige Kristyn Wheeler, et al.

No. 2:25-CV-00051 RWS (E.D. Mo. Jan. 16, 2026) · No. No. 2:25-CV-00051 RWS · Decided January 16, 2026

SUMMARY

The court granted Brian Peak leave to proceed in forma pauperis but assessed an initial partial filing fee of \$1.00. The court dismissed the action without prejudice under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), holding that the claims were barred or deficient based on sovereign, prosecutorial, and judicial immunity, Younger abstention, lack of municipal liability allegations, and failure to exhaust state remedies regarding bond. The court denied the plaintiff’s requests for injunctive relief and appointment of counsel as moot.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri, Northern Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	W. Rodney Sippel
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri, Northern Division
DECIDED	January 16, 2026
DOCKET	No. 2:25-CV-00051 RWS
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff, a state pretrial detainee proceeding under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and seeking leave to proceed in forma pauperis, challenged aspects of his ongoing Missouri criminal prosecution, including prosecution under Missouri Revised Statute § 566.030, the conduct of state judges and a prosecutor, and his bond conditions. The federal district court screened the complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), granted in forma pauperis status subject to a \$1.00 initial partial filing fee, denied injunctive relief, and dismissed the action without prejudice.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	De novo screening under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), accepting well-pleaded factual allegations as true, liberally construing the pro se complaint, and determining whether the complaint is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a plausible claim, or seeks relief from an immune defendant.

TOPICS

section 1983

sovereign immunity

injunctions

habeas corpus

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights

constitutional law

criminal procedure

federal courts

prisoner litigation

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Peak's claims against the prosecutor in her official and individual capacities were barred by sovereign immunity and prosecutorial immunity.
2. Whether Peak's claims against the state judges were barred by judicial immunity.
3. Whether Peak adequately pleaded a claim against Knox County Circuit Court or a local governmental entity under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.
4. Whether Younger abstention barred federal intervention in Peak's ongoing state criminal proceedings.
5. Whether Peak's challenge to his bond was cognizable in this § 1983 action before exhaustion of available state remedies.

HOLDINGS

1. Claims against the prosecutor in her official capacity were treated as claims against the State of Missouri and were barred by the Eleventh Amendment because neither congressional abrogation nor state waiver applied.
2. The prosecutor was absolutely immune from Peak's individual-capacity claims because the challenged conduct involved prosecutorial advocacy in the initiation and prosecution of a criminal case.
3. Peak's claims against the state judges were barred by absolute judicial immunity because the challenged conduct consisted of judicial acts within their jurisdiction.
4. Peak failed to state a § 1983 claim against Knox County Circuit Court because he did not plead an official policy, unofficial custom, or deliberately indifferent failure to train or supervise, and the court itself was not a suable juridical entity.
5. Younger abstention required dismissal of Peak's requests to enjoin or otherwise interfere with his ongoing state criminal proceedings because the proceedings implicated important state interests and no extraordinary circumstance was shown.
6. Peak's excessive-bond claim was dismissed because challenges to pretrial custody and bond were subject to 28 U.S.C. § 2241 and available state remedies had not been exhausted.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“An action is frivolous if it “lacks an arguable basis in either law or fact.””

“A claim is facially plausible when the plaintiff “pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.””

“Younger requires federal courts to abstain from hearing cases when there is an ongoing state judicial proceeding that implicates important state interests and affords an adequate opportunity to raise the federal questions presented, absent extraordinary circumstances where the danger of irreparable injury to the federal plaintiff is both great and immediate.”

“This case is DISMISSED without prejudice.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Brian Peak was incarcerated at the Macon County Jail while facing a Missouri criminal prosecution for rape or attempted rape of a person alleged to lack the mental capacity to consent. He alleged that he had difficulty hearing during his preliminary hearing, that Missouri Revised Statute § 566.030 was being unlawfully applied to him, and that the prosecution conflicted with the Americans with Disabilities Act. He also challenged the actions of state judges and the amount and handling of his bond, seeking federal intervention in his ongoing state criminal case.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Peak was charged in Missouri state court with rape or attempted rape involving a person allegedly unable to consent because of mental incapacity. The criminal case was transferred from Macon County to Knox County and remained pending, with trial scheduled for January 2026. Peak filed this federal civil-rights action against a prosecutor, state judges, and Knox County Circuit Court, seeking release, injunctive relief, and relief concerning his bond. The district court dismissed under the in forma pauperis screening statute, concluding that the claims were barred by sovereign, prosecutorial, and judicial immunity, failed to plead municipal liability, were barred by Younger abstention, or were unexhausted and improperly brought as to the bond challenge.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Henderson v. Norris, 129 F.3d 481, 484 (8th Cir. 1997)
- Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 328 (1989)
- Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555, 570 (2007)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678-79 (2009)
- Barton v. Taber, 820 F.3d 958, 964 (8th Cir. 2016)
- Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 106 (1976)
- Solomon v. Petray, 795 F.3d 777, 787 (8th Cir. 2015)
- Stone v. Harry, 364 F.3d 912, 914-15 (8th Cir. 2004)
- Martin v. Aubuchon, 623 F.2d 1282, 1286 (8th Cir. 1980)

- *McNeil v. United States*, 508 U.S. 106, 113 (1993)
- *Peak v. Circuit Court of Knox County*, No. ED113621 (Mo. Ct. App. June 10, 2025)
- *Va. Office for Protection & Advocacy v. Stewart*, 563 U.S. 247, 253 (2011)
- *Edelman v. Jordan*, 415 U.S. 651, 662-63 (1974)
- *Cecelia Webb v. City of Maplewood*, *Webb v. City of Maplewood*, 889 F.3d 483, 485 (8th Cir. 2018)
- *Dover Elevator Co. v. Arkansas State University*, 64 F.3d 442, 446 (8th Cir. 1995)
- *Egerdahl v. Hibbing Community College*, 72 F.3d 615, 618-19 (8th Cir. 1995)
- *Monroe v. Arkansas State University*, 495 F.3d 591, 594 (8th Cir. 2007)
- *Barnes v. State of Missouri*, 960 F.2d 62, 64-65 (8th Cir. 1992)
- *Welch v. Texas Department of Highways & Public Transportation*, 483 U.S. 468, 473 (1987)
- *Quern v. Jordan*, 440 U.S. 332, 341 (1979)
- *Price v. Moody*, 677 F.2d 676, 677 (8th Cir. 1982)
- *Keating v. Martin*, 638 F.2d 1121, 1122 (8th Cir. 1980)
- *Brodnicki v. City of Omaha*, 75 F.3d 1261, 1266 (8th Cir. 1996)
- *Reasonover v. City of St. Louis, Missouri*, 447 F.3d 569, 580 (8th Cir. 2006)
- *Saterdalen v. Spencer*, 725 F.3d 838, 842 (8th Cir. 2013)
- *Woodworth v. Hulshof*, 891 F.3d 1083, 1089-90 (8th Cir. 2018)
- *Justice Network, Inc. v. Craighead County*, 931 F.3d 753, 760 (8th Cir. 2019)
- *Kelly v. City of Omaha, Nebraska*, 813 F.3d 1070, 1075 (8th Cir. 2016)
- *Mildfelt v. Circuit Court of Jackson County, Missouri*, 827 F.2d 343, 345 (8th Cir. 1987)
- *Harris v. Missouri Court of Appeals, Western District*, 787 F.2d 427, 429 (8th Cir. 1986)
- *Younger v. Harris*, 401 U.S. 37 (1971)
- *Norwood v. Dickey*, 409 F.3d 901, 903 (8th Cir. 2005)
- *Fuller v. Ulland*, 76 F.3d 957, 959 (8th Cir. 1996)
- *Sacco v. Falke*, 649 F.2d 634, 636 (8th Cir. 1981)
- *Neville v. Cavanagh*, 611 F.2d 673, 675 (7th Cir. 1979)
- *Dever v. Kansas State Penitentiary*, 36 F.3d 1531, 1534 (10th Cir. 1994)
- *Dickerson v. State of Louisiana*, 816 F.2d 220, 224 (5th Cir. 1987)
- *Fuller v. Rich*, 11 F.3d 61, 62 (5th Cir. 1994)

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