

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
ALABAMA, NORTHEASTERN DIVISION

Stanley B. Stallworth v. Dr. Gary Crosby, et al.

No. 5:23-cv-01533-MHH (N.D. Ala. Apr. 17, 2026) · No. 5:23-cv-01533-MHH · Decided April 17, 2026

SUMMARY

The court addresses a pro se plaintiff’s claims under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and Alabama law arising from alleged privacy intrusions and interference with expressive and intimate association during related litigation. It denies the defendants’ Rule 12(b)(1) motion, but grants their Rule 12(b)(6) motion on qualified-immunity grounds as to the § 1983 claims. The court also directs the plaintiff to explain whether and how he may proceed against the unserved defendants and postpones consideration of the state-law claims.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of Alabama, Northeastern Division
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of Alabama, Northeastern Division
DECIDED	April 17, 2026
DOCKET	5:23-cv-01533-MHH
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff brought claims under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and Alabama law. The served defendants moved to dismiss under Federal Rules of Civil Procedure 12(b)(1) and 12(b)(6); three additional defendants had not been served.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	For Rule 12(b)(1), the plaintiff bears the burden of establishing standing. For Rule 12(b)(6), the court evaluates whether the complaint contains sufficient factual matter, accepted as true and viewed in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party, to state a plausible claim for relief. Qualified immunity requires determining whether the defendant acted within discretionary authority and, if so, whether the plaintiff alleged violation of a clearly established constitutional right.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court opinion

PARTIES

Stanley B. Stallworth v. Dr. Gary Crosby, Brian Ruble, Ane Debro,
Peter Blum, Michael Canfield, Canfield Computer Solutions

TOPICS

motions to dismiss

standing

qualified immunity

section 1983

first amendment

PRACTICE AREAS

Civil procedure

Constitutional law

Civil rights litigation

Section 1983 litigation

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Stallworth alleged an injury in fact sufficient to establish Article III standing for his First Amendment expressive-association and intimate-association claims.
2. Whether the served A&M defendants were entitled to qualified immunity from Stallworth's § 1983 claims at the pleading stage.
3. Whether the court should address service and potential qualified-immunity or § 1983 issues concerning the unserved defendants before extending the service period.
4. Whether Stallworth's state-law invasion-of-privacy claims should be resolved at that stage.

HOLDINGS

1. Stallworth sufficiently alleged injury in fact because he alleged impairment of his First Amendment expressive-association rights and interference with his ability to associate with persons of his choosing. The court therefore denied the Rule 12(b)(1) motion to dismiss for lack of standing.
2. The A&M defendants were entitled to qualified immunity because their alleged conduct fell within their discretionary authority and Stallworth did not identify precedent sufficiently particularized to the alleged facts showing that they violated a clearly established constitutional right.
3. Before deciding whether to extend the service period for the unserved defendants, the court required Stallworth to identify the legal authority permitting § 1983 claims against Mr. Canfield, Mr. Blum, and Canfield Computer and to explain why qualified immunity did not apply to the federal claims against Mr. Canfield and Mr. Blum.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“To survive a motion to dismiss, a complaint must contain sufficient factual matter, accepted as true, to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” (unpaginated)

“for a right to be clearly established, existing precedent must have placed the statutory or constitutional question beyond debate.” (unpaginated)

“the contours of the right were sufficiently clear that every reasonable [actor] would have understood that what he was doing violates that right.” (unpaginated)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Stallworth represented Dr. Jones in litigation involving Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University. He alleged that university employees and related investigators searched and annotated text messages and investigated a previously closed and expunged criminal proceeding, revealing or documenting sexually explicit material, homosexuality-related communications, and information concerning his perceived sexual orientation. He claimed that this conduct chilled expressive and intimate association and violated his constitutional privacy and association rights, causing financial, emotional, and reputational harm.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Stallworth filed an amended complaint alleging that defendants investigated and disclosed private information, including information concerning homosexuality and a prior criminal proceeding, during litigation involving Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University. The A&M defendants moved to dismiss. The court denied the Rule 12(b)(1) challenge for lack of standing but granted the Rule 12(b)(6) motion on the § 1983 claims based on qualified immunity. The court deferred consideration of the state-law claims and ordered Stallworth to identify within 14 days the legal basis for maintaining § 1983 claims against the unserved defendants and to explain why qualified immunity did not apply.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Jones v. The Board of Trustees for Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University, No. 5:17-cv-01723-MHH (N.D. Ala.)
- Kokkonen v. Guardian Life Insurance Co. of America, 511 U.S. 375, 377 (1994)
- Spokeo, Inc. v. Robins, 578 U.S. 330, 338 (2016)
- City of Miami Gardens v. Wells Fargo & Co., 931 F.3d 1274, 1282 (11th Cir. 2019)
- Roberts v. U.S. Jaycees, 468 U.S. 609, 617-18 (1984)
- Speech First, Inc. v. Cartwright, 32 F.4th 1110, 1119 (11th Cir. 2022)
- McCabe v. Sharrett, 12 F.3d 1558, 1563 (11th Cir. 1994)
- Moody v. Michigan Gaming Control Board, 847 F.3d 399, 403 (6th Cir. 2017)
- Adkins v. Board of Education of Magoffin County, 982 F.2d 952, 953 (6th Cir. 1993)
- Sowards v. Loudon County, 203 F.3d 426, 430 (6th Cir. 2000)
- Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 93-94 (2007)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009)
- Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007)
- Watts v. Florida International University, 495 F.3d 1289, 1295 (11th Cir. 2007)
- Grossman v. Nationsbank, N.A., 225 F.3d 1228, 1231 (11th Cir. 2000)
- Carter v. Butts County, 821 F.3d 1310, 1318 (11th Cir. 2016)

- Pearson v. Callahan, 555 U.S. 223, 231, 236 (2009)
- Harlow v. Fitzgerald, 457 U.S. 800, 818 (1982)
- Miller v. Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office, 129 F.4th 1329, 1333 (11th Cir. 2025)
- Townsend v. Jefferson County, 601 F.3d 1152, 1157 (11th Cir. 2010)
- Alcocer v. Mills, 906 F.3d 944, 951 (11th Cir. 2018)
- Jarrard v. Sheriff of Polk County, 115 F.4th 1306, 1323-24 (11th Cir. 2024)
- Holloman ex rel. Holloman v. Harland, 370 F.3d 1252, 1265-66 (11th Cir. 2004)
- White v. Pauly, 580 U.S. 73, 79-81 (2017)
- Mullenix v. Luna, 577 U.S. 7, 12 (2015)
- Ashcroft v. al-Kidd, 563 U.S. 731, 742 (2011)
- Anderson v. Creighton, 483 U.S. 635, 640 (1987)
- Richardson v. McKnight, 521 U.S. 399, 403 (1997)
- Filarsky v. Delia, 566 U.S. 377, 393-94 (2012)

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