

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF  
CALIFORNIA

Michael Manjeet Singh v. Pheiffer, et al.

Singh v. Pheiffer · No. 1:22-cv-01412-KES-EPG (PC) · Decided December 3, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California partially overruled defendants’ objections based on the official information privilege to producing investigative documents and recordings in a prisoner civil rights action. The court ordered production of specified interview summaries, a photograph, a disability/accommodation summary, and several staff interview recordings, subject to redaction of investigative analyses and personnel information. The court permitted defendants to withhold other inmate interview materials and a recording containing unrelated investigative information.

CASE DETAILS

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| COURT              | United States District Court for the Eastern District of California                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| JURISDICTION       | United States District Court for the Eastern District of California                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| DECIDED            | December 3, 2025                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| DOCKET             | 1:22-cv-01412-KES-EPG (PC)                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| DISPOSITION        | other                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| PROCEDURAL POSTURE | The court ruled on defendants’ objections to producing investigative documents and audio recordings in discovery based on the official information privilege, after conducting in camera review.                                                      |
| STANDARD OF REVIEW | For the official information privilege, the court conducted in camera review and balanced the potential benefits of disclosure against the potential disadvantages. Discovery relevance was evaluated under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 26(b)(1). |
| PRECEDENTIAL VALUE | unpublished district court order                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

TOPICS

- discovery dispute
- privilege
- prisoners rights
- section 1983
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

- Civil procedure
- Federal civil-rights litigation
- Prisoner litigation
- Discovery privilege

## QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the official information privilege required withholding the prison grievance-investigation materials and interview recordings from discovery.
2. Whether the relevance of direct witness accounts, a photograph, and a disability/accommodation summary outweighed the asserted confidentiality, safety, retaliation, and investigative-integrity concerns.
3. Which portions of the investigative materials were subject to production and which could be withheld or redacted.

## HOLDINGS

1. The official information privilege is qualified in this federal civil-rights discovery dispute, and its application requires in camera review and balancing the benefits of disclosure against the potential disadvantages.
2. Defendants must produce the interview summaries of Plaintiff and identified CDCR staff, Plaintiff's photograph, Plaintiff's disability/accommodation summary, and the audio recordings of interviews with Pinedo, Dillard, Diaz, Vieth, and Fowler, subject to permitted redactions.
3. Defendants may withhold the audio recordings and written summaries of other inmate witnesses, Captain Waddle's audio recording, institutional analyses and opinions, and CDCR personnel and contact information because the disadvantages of disclosure outweigh their relevance.

## KEY QUOTATIONS

*"The "common law governmental privilege (encompassing and referred to sometimes as the official or state secret privilege) . . . is only a qualified privilege, contingent upon the competing interests of the requesting litigant and subject to disclosure." (at 3)*

*"After weighing the potential benefits with disadvantages of disclosure, the Court finds that Defendants are entitled to withhold the audio recordings and written summaries of other inmates, the audio recording of Waddle's interview, and the institution's analyses, opinions, and CDCR personnel and contact information under the official information privilege because the potential disadvantages of disclosure outweigh the relevance of the documents to the litigation." (at 7)*

## FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff alleges that correctional officers took his wheelchair and kicked and struck him in the head while he was on the ground. He alleges that he was unable to use his wheelchair to board an ambulance and was thereby denied medical treatment. The requested materials consisted of prison grievance-investigation reports, witness interview summaries and recordings, a photograph, and a disability/accommodation summary concerning the incident.

## PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff, a state prisoner proceeding pro se and in forma pauperis, filed this 42 U.S.C. § 1983 action in 2022. The case was transferred from the Northern District of California to the Eastern District of California on November 2, 2022, and discovery opened on June 4, 2025. Defendants objected to producing an internal grievance-allegation investigation report and eight interview recordings; the court overruled the objections in part and sustained them in part.

## DISPOSITION

other

## CASES CITED

- Kerr v. U.S. Dist. Ct. for the N. Dist. of Cal., 511 F.2d 192, 197-98 (9th Cir. 1975), aff'd, 426 U.S. 394 (1976)
- Breed v. U.S. Dist. Ct. for the N. Dist. of Cal., 542 F.2d 1114, 1116 (9th Cir. 1976)
- Sanchez v. City of Santa Ana, 936 F.2d 1027, 1033-34 (9th Cir. 1991)
- Woodford v. Ngo, 548 U.S. 81, 94-95 (2006)

## OPINION

1 2 3 4 5 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT 6 EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA 7 8  
9 MICHAEL MANJEET SINGH, Case No. 1:22-cv-01412-KES-EPG (PC) 10 Plaintiff, ORDER  
OVERRULING IN PART DEFENDANTS' OBJECTIONS TO 11 v. PRODUCTION OF  
DOCUMENTS BASED ON THE OFFICIAL INFORMATION 12 PHEIFFER, et al.,  
PRIVILEGE 13 Defendants. (ECF No. 88) 14 15 Plaintiff Michael Manjeet Singh is a state  
prisoner proceeding pro se and in forma 16 pauperis in this civil rights action filed pursuant to 42  
U.S.C. § 1983.

Plaintiff filed the 17 complaint commencing this action on May 27, 2022. (ECF No. 9).<sup>1</sup> This case  
proceeds on 18 Plaintiff claims against: (1) Defendants Veith and Fowler for excessive force in  
violation of the 19 Eighth Amendment; (2) Defendants Veith, Fowler, and Diaz for deliberate  
indifference to a 20 serious medical need in violation of the Eighth Amendment; and (3)  
Defendants Veith, Fowler, 21 and Diaz for state law claims of negligent failure to protect and  
failure to summon medical care.

22 Now before the Court is Defendants' Notice of Lodging of Documents for In Camera 23  
Review (ECF No. 88), which is construed as objections to the Court's Order Requiring Parties to  
24 Exchange Documents (ECF No. 78). Over 60 days have passed since Defendants filed their 25  
objections, and Plaintiff has not filed a response. 26 27 1 On November 2, 2022, Plaintiff's case  
was transferred to this Court from the Northern District of California.

(ECF No. 19). The Court notes that Plaintiff filed a duplicate copy of his original complaint on 28  
August 4, 2022, which was docketed as "Amended Complaint." (ECF No. 15). 1 Having reviewed

the documents and audio recordings submitted for in camera review, the 2 Court finds that Defendants' objections to production are overruled in part. 3 I. BACKGROUND 4 This case proceeds on Plaintiff's Eighth Amendment claims for excessive force and deliberate indifference to serious medical needs based on Plaintiff alleging that Defendants took 5 Plaintiff's wheelchair and "attack[ed] Plaintiff" by kicking and striking him in the head while he 6 was on the ground.

(ECF No. 28, at pp. 10, 17). Plaintiff alleges that he could not use his 7 wheelchair to board the ambulance following the incident, and therefore, Defendants denied him 8 medical treatment. (Id.). Plaintiff asserts related state law claims for negligent failure to protect 9 and failure to summon medical care arising from the same "attack." (Id.). 10 The Court opened discovery on June 4, 2025.

(ECF No. 78). To secure the just, speedy, 11 and inexpensive disposition of this action, the Court directed the parties to exchange certain 12 documents, including "[w]itness statements and evidence that were generated from 13 investigation(s) related to the event(s) at issue in the complaint, such as an investigation 14 stemming from the processing of Plaintiff's grievance(s), if any." (ECF No. 78, at 2).

15 On September 17, 2025, Defendants filed a Notice of Lodging of Documents for In 16 Camera Review, asserting official information privilege for withholding the Grievance Allegation 17 Inquiry Report and exhibits, along with eight audio-recorded interviews related to Plaintiff's 18 claims. (ECF No. 88). Defendants also submitted the Declaration of T. Redmon, the Grievance 19 Coordinator at Kern Valley State Prison (KVSP), which describes these documents and 20 recordings as being confidential under California Code of Regulations, Title 15, Section 3321.

21 Redmon describes the risk that such documents could be given to other inmates, and that 22 disclosure would reveal investigative techniques and potentially impede future investigations. 23 Redmon also asserts that the interview recordings and written summaries of nonparty inmates should not be produced because inmates might be less willing to speak to prison staff in 24 the future if they believed their statements would be shared with other inmates and disclosure 25 would subject them to potential retaliation.

Even if the witness names were redacted, Redmon 26 asserts that the content of the statements would allow Plaintiff to identify the witness(es), risking 27 retaliation by other inmates. 28 1 Redmon argues that disclosure of audio-recorded interviews and written summaries of 2 California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) staff, including Defendants, 3 would inhibit future staff witnesses from freely providing information to investigators, impeding 4 the ability of the CDCR to conduct accurate and reliable inquiries into staff misconduct.

Finally, Redmon explains that the Grievance Allegation Inquiry Report contains personnel 5 information such as badge numbers, personnel (PERNR) numbers, and work email addresses and

6 phone numbers for Defendants and other CDCR staff members. Redmon argues that this 7 information is protected from disclosure under state law. He asserts that inmates in CDCR 8 facilities are subject to intense pressure from other inmates, including prison gang members, to 9 disclose private information they may learn about CDCR staff and may use force to obtain the 10 information, endangering the security of the facility and the safety of other inmates and staff.

11 On September 17, 2025, Defendants submitted the withheld documents to the Court for in 12 camera review and provided Plaintiff and the Court with a privilege log of the documents. 13 Specifically, Defendants submitted the following documents for in camera review: 14 • AGO 000081-155: The Office of Internal Affairs, Allegation Inquiry Management 15 Section (AIMS) Grievance Allegation Inquiry Report (AIMS Inquiry No. C- 16 AIMS-KVSP-1171-21) and Exhibits; and 17 • Eight Audio-Recorded Interviews Related to AIMS Inquiry No. C-AIMS-KVSP- 18 1171-21.

19 Defendants certified that a copy of their Notice of Lodging of Documents for In Camera 20 Review was mailed to Plaintiff on September 17, 2025. (ECF No. 88). Defendants also stated 21 that they would serve a copy of their privilege log to Plaintiff separately, along with Redmon's 22 declaration. (ECF No. 88, at 2). 23 To date, Plaintiff has not filed a response to Defendants' notice or their assertion of official information privilege.

24 25 II. LEGAL STANDARDS 26 Rule 26 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure allows a party to obtain discovery 27 "regarding any nonprivileged matter that is relevant to any party's claim or defense." Fed. R. 28 Civ. P. 26(b)(1). Questions of privilege in federal civil rights cases are governed by federal law. 1 Fed. R. Evid. 501; *Kerr v. U.S. Dist. Ct. for N. Dist. of California*, 511 F.2d 192, 197 (9th Cir.

2 1975), *aff'd*, 426 U.S. 394 (1976). 3 The "common law governmental privilege (encompassing and referred to sometimes as 4 the official or state secret privilege)... is only a qualified privilege, contingent upon the competing interests of the requesting litigant and subject to disclosure." *Kerr v. U.S. Dist. Ct. for 5 N. Dist. of Cal.*, 511 F.2d 192, 198 (9th Cir.

1975) (citations omitted). The Ninth Circuit has 6 since followed *Kerr* in requiring in camera review and a balancing of interests in ruling on the 7 government's claim of the official information privilege. See, e.g., *Breed v. U.S. Dist. Ct. for N. 8 Dist. of Cal.*, 542 F.2d 1114, 1116 (9th Cir. 1976) ("[A]s required by *Kerr*, we recognize 'that in 9 camera review is a highly appropriate and useful means of dealing with claims of governmental 10 privilege.'" (quoting *Kerr*, 426 U.S. at 406); *Sanchez v. City of Santa Ana*, 936 F.2d 1027, 1033- 11 34 (9th Cir.

1990) ("Government personnel files are considered official information. To 12 determine whether the information sought is privileged, courts must weigh the potential benefits 13 of disclosure against the potential disadvantages. If the latter is greater, the privilege bars 14 discovery.")

(internal citations omitted). 15 III. ANALYSIS 16 With these legal standards in mind, the Court has reviewed the documents and audio 17 recordings provided for in camera review.

The Court finds that Defendants' objections to certain 18 portions of documents and recordings should be overruled. 19 The documents submitted for in camera review include interview audio recordings, 20 written interview summaries, and other documents, as follows: 21 • AGO 000081-155: AIMS Grievance Allegation Report, containing: 22 o AGO 000082-84, 000136-140: summaries of interview with Plaintiff; 23 o AGO 000086-87: summary of interview of Correctional Officer Pinedo; 24 o AGO 000087-88: summary of interview of Psychiatric Technician Dillard; 25 o AGO 000088-90: summary of interview of Correctional Officer Diaz; 26 o AGO 000090-91: summary of interview of Correctional Officer Vieth; 27 o AGO 000091-92: summary of interview of Correctional Officer Fowler; 28 o AGO 000092-93: summary of interview of Correctional Captain Waddle; 1 • AGO 000094: Plaintiff's photograph; 2 • AGO 000096: DPP Disability/Accommodation Summary; 3 • Interview audio recording of Correctional Officer Pinedo; 4 • Interview audio recording of Psychiatric Technician Dillard; • Interview audio recording of Correctional Officer Diaz; 5 • Interview audio recording of Correctional Officer Vieth; 6 • Interview audio recording of Correctional Officer Fowler; 7 • Interview audio recording of Correctional Officer Waddle; and 8 • Other inmate interview audio recordings 9 In considering the potential benefits of disclosure, the Court has considered whether the 10 Grievance Allegation Report with interview summaries, audio recordings, photograph, and DPP 11 Disability/Accommodation Summary are relevant to Plaintiff's claim of excessive force, 12 deliberate indifference to serious medical needs, and state law claims of failure to protect and 13 failure to summon medical care.

The written witness interview summaries and audio recordings 14 contain direct evidence regarding the incident in this case, including contemporary witness 15 accounts of the event recorded close to the time to the incident that occurred. See *Woodford v. Ngo*, 548 U.S. 81, 94–95 (2006).

The photograph of the Plaintiff was identified by each witness 17 during their interview, and the DPP Disability/Accommodation Summary is relevant to Plaintiff's 18 use of a wheelchair at the time of the incident. Such evidence is directly relevant to this case and 19 could be used as evidence at summary judgment or trial in this matter. 20 The Court has also evaluated Defendants' objections and considered the potential 21 disadvantages of disclosing the written interview summaries, audio recordings, photograph, and 22 DPP Disability/Accommodation Summary.

The interview summaries for all CDCR staff and the 23 audio recordings for Pinedo, Dillard, Diaz, Vieth, and Fowler are short and straightforward and do not reveal any confidential techniques that could undermine the effectiveness of such 24 investigations in the future.

Moreover, as discussed below, the Court is only requiring production 25 of the written interview summaries themselves, not the entire Grievance Allegation Report or any 26 related discussion or evaluation of those summaries that could reveal the institution's techniques, 27 impressions or personnel information, such as badge numbers, personnel (PERNR) numbers, and 28 1 work email addresses and phone numbers for Defendants and other CDCR staff members.

The 2 Court disagrees that disclosing such interviews would cause witnesses in the future to be less 3 truthful in similar investigations. On the contrary, the fact that witness statements may be used 4 later in court would seem to encourage candor in such situations.

The Court has also examined the photograph, and the Court does not find any information 5 that could reveal confidential techniques that could undermine the effectiveness of such 6 investigations in the future or lead to future misconduct. Rather, the photograph merely shows 7 Plaintiff's head and shoulders against a blank background. While Defendants submitted the DPP 8 Disability/Accommodation Summary for in camera review, they make no objection or argument 9 regarding the summary.

10 The Court finds that disclosure of these documents, or portions of documents, and audio 11 recordings of Pinedo, Dillard, Diaz, Vieth, and Fowler would promote the truth-finding process 12 because they contain details of the parties' actions and statements recorded close to the time that 13 the relevant events occurred. See *Woodford*, 548 U.S. at 94–95.

The Court finds that the 14 disadvantages and risks identified in Defendants' objections do not outweigh the benefits that 15 disclosure of these documents, or portions of documents, and recordings would have to this case. 16 *Sanchez*, 936 F.2d at 1033-34. 17 The documents submitted to the Court also contain audio recordings and summaries of 18 witness interviews of other inmates.

After careful review of these summaries and recordings, the 19 Court sustains Defendants' objections to their production and permits Defendants to withhold 20 them from discovery. While these statements are relevant to the extent they concern the incident 21 and/or Plaintiff's allegations at the time, based on the Court's review of their contents, the Court 22 does not believe these witness summaries would substantially assist Plaintiff in proving his case 23 because they either indicate a lack of information about the allegations, or are not supportive of Plaintiff's allegations.

Disclosure of such witness summaries could risk retaliation against those 24 witnesses. Moreover, future witnesses may be less willing to provide information to prison 25 authorities if such information were made public. 26 Similarly, the Court sustains Defendants' objections to the production of Correctional 27 Captain Waddle's audio-recorded interview.

The recording includes a description of a separate 28 1 investigation for another inmate, unrelated and irrelevant to Plaintiff or his claims. Any relevant 2 information Waddle provided was summarized in her written interview summary at AGO 3 000092-93.

The Court finds that the disclosure of Waddle's audio recording could reveal 4 information about other inmates participating in unrelated investigations, exposing inmate witnesses to potential retaliation from other inmates. 5 The Court sustains Defendants' objection to production of (1) the institution's analyses 6 and opinions, and (2) CDCR personnel information such as badge numbers, personnel (PERNR) 7 numbers, work email addresses and phone numbers for Defendants and other CDCR staff 8 members.

The analyses, opinions, and personnel information are not directly relevant to the case 9 because they are not direct evidence of what took place, and disclosure could risk the safety and 10 security concerns identified in Defendants' objections.

As such, the Grievance Allegation Report 11 may be produced in redacted form to include only the interview summaries of Plaintiff and 12 CDCR staff, and not any other information including internal analysis or opinions regarding those 13 summaries, or personnel information such as badge numbers, personnel (PERNR) numbers, and 14 work email addresses and phone numbers for Defendants and other CDCR staff members.

15 After weighing the potential benefits with disadvantages of disclosure, the Court finds that 16 Defendants are entitled to withhold the audio recordings and written summaries of other inmates, 17 the audio recording of Waddle's interview, and the institution's analyses, opinions, and CDCR 18 personnel and contact information under the official information privilege because the potential 19 disadvantages of disclosure outweigh the relevance of the documents to the litigation.

20 IV. CONCLUSION 21 For the foregoing reasons, Defendants' objection to production of documents and 22 recordings (ECF No. 88) is overruled in part. 23 1. No later than 30 days from the date of this order, Defendants shall provide the 24 following portion of documents<sup>2</sup> to Plaintiff: 25 26 2 Only the portions of the documents described above, containing direct evidence and summary of witness accounts of the incident, shall be produced.

Defendants may redact the institution's description of the 27 process, analysis, conclusions of investigating staff, as well as personnel information such as badge numbers, personnel (PERNR) numbers, and work email addresses and phone numbers for Defendants and 28 other CDCR staff members. 1 o AGO 000082-84, 000136-140: summaries of interview with Plaintiff; 2 o AGO 000086-87: summary of interview of Correctional Officer Pinedo; 3 o AGO 000087-88: summary of interview of Psychiatric Technician Dillard; 4 o AGO 000088-90: summary of interview of Correctional Officer Diaz; 5 o AGO 000090-91: summary of interview of Correctional Officer Vieth; 6 o AGO 000091-92: summary of interview of Correctional Officer Fowler; 7 o AGO

000092-93: summary of interview of Correctional Captain Waddle; o AGO 000094: photograph of Plaintiff; 9 o AGO 000096: Plaintiffs DPP Disability/Accommodation Summary; and o Interview audio recordings of Correctional Officers Pinedo, Diaz, Vieth, and Fowler, along with Psychiatric Technician Dillard.

2. Additionally, Defendants shall file a notice of compliance with the Court concurrently 2 with production to Plaintiff. 13 4 IT IS SO ORDERED. 15 Dated: \_ December 3, 2025 [sf ey 16 UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28