

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE CENTRAL DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Tammie LaRae Bowser Foreign Grantor Trust v. Shellpoint
Mortgage Servicing

No. CV 25-5855-JFW(AGRx), United States District Court for the Central District of California (July 22, 2025)

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Central District of California dismissed without prejudice an action brought by the Tammie LaRae Bowser Foreign Grantor Trust. The court held that Bowser, a non-attorney, could not represent the trust pro se absent a showing that she was the beneficial owner of the trust's claims, and noted her failure to respond to two orders to show cause and repeated violations of court rules and orders.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Central District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	John F. Walter
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Central District of California
DECIDED	July 22, 2025
DOCKET	CV 25-5855-JFW(AGRx)
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The district court sua sponte dismissed the action without prejudice after the individual attempting to represent the trust pro se failed to respond to two orders to show cause and failed to obtain counsel for the trust.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unpublished district court order; precedential status is not identified in the source.

TOPICS

- trusts
- civil procedure
- pleadings
- motions to dismiss

PRACTICE AREAS

- civil procedure
- trusts
- pro se representation

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether a non-attorney trustee may represent a trust pro se in federal court.
2. Whether the action should be dismissed when the individual attempting to represent the trust fails to obtain counsel and fails to respond to orders to show cause.
3. Whether repeated violations of court orders and Local Rules provide an independent basis for dismissal under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(b).

HOLDINGS

1. A non-attorney generally may not represent a trust pro se in federal court because the privilege of self-representation is personal to the individual, not to a trust or other entity. A trustee may do so only if she demonstrates that she is the beneficial owner of the trust's claims.
2. The action was properly dismissed without prejudice because Bowser failed to respond to two orders to show cause concerning her improper pro se representation of the trust and failed to obtain counsel for the trust.
3. Repeated violations of the court's standing order, self-representation order, and Local Rules supplied a separate ground for dismissal under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(b).

KEY QUOTATIONS

“However, although a non-attorney may appear pro se, “that privilege is personal to him.”” (Order discussion)

“As a result, a pro se litigant generally may not “pursu[e] claims on behalf of others in a representative capacity.”” (Order discussion)

“In addition, the Ninth Circuit has explicitly held that a non-attorney trustee may not represent a trust pro se in federal court.” (Order discussion)

“Accordingly, this action is DISMISSED without prejudice.” (Order discussion)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Tammie LaRae Bowser attempted to represent the Tammie LaRae Bowser Foreign Grantor Trust pro se in federal court. The court had warned her through two orders to show cause that the trust could not proceed without authorized counsel, but she failed to respond and failed to obtain counsel for the trust. She also repeatedly filed documents that violated the court's standing order, self-representation order, and Local Rules.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The court issued orders to show cause on July 7 and July 14, 2025, concerning Bowser's attempt to represent the trust without counsel. Bowser did not respond to either order and did not obtain counsel. The court also found repeated violations of its standing order, self-representation order, and Local Rules, and dismissed the action without prejudice under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(b).

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- C.E. Pope Equity Tr. v. United States, 818 F.2d 696 (9th Cir. 1987)
- Simon v. Hartford Life, Inc., 546 F.3d 661, 664 (9th Cir. 2008)
- United States v. Molen, 2011 WL 292150, at *6 (E.D. Cal. Jan. 31, 2011)
- Aldridge v. United States, 2011 WL 2516622, at *1 (E.D. Cal. June 23, 2011)
- Aldridge v. United States, 2011 WL 13242884 (E.D. Cal. Aug. 30, 2011)
- Hall v. Wash. Mut. Bank, 2010 WL 11549664, at *3 (C.D. Cal. July 7, 2010)
- Yourish v. California Amplifier, 191 F.3d 983, 986-88 (9th Cir. 1999)
- Ferdik v. Bonzelet, 963 F.2d 1258, 1260 (9th Cir. 1992)

OPINION

Tammie LaRae Bowser Foreign Grantor Trust v. Shellpoint Mortgage Servicing
PER CURIAM.

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT JS-6

CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

CIVIL MINUTES -- GENERAL

Case No. CV 25-5855-JFW(AGRx) Date: July 22, 2025 Title: Tammie LaRae Bowser Foreign Grantor Trust -v- Shellpoint Mortgage Servicing, et al. PRESENT:

HONORABLE JOHN F. WALTER, UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

Shannon Reilly None Present Courtroom Deputy Court Reporter ATTORNEYS PRESENT FOR PLAINTIFFS: ATTORNEYS PRESENT FOR DEFENDANTS: None None

PROCEEDINGS (IN CHAMBERS): ORDER DISMISSING ACTION

Tammie LaRae Bowser (“Bowser”) has attempted to represent pro se Plaintiff Tammie LaRae Bowser Foreign Grantor Trust (“Plaintiff”). In federal court, a non-attorney generally may represent herself on her own behalf. See 28 U.S.C. § 1654 (“In all courts of the United States the parties may plead and conduct their own cases personally or by counsel”). However, although a non-attorney may appear pro se, “that privilege is personal to him.” C.E. Pope Equity Tr. v. United States, 818 F.2d 696, 697 (9th Cir. 1987). As a result, a pro se litigant generally may not “pursu[e] claims on behalf of others in a representative capacity.” Simon v. Hartford Life, Inc., 546 F.3d 661, 664 (9th Cir. 2008). Indeed, this District’s Local Rules reflect this general principle by providing that “[o]nly individuals may represent themselves pro se. No organization or entity of any other kind (including corporations, limited liability corporations, partnerships, limited liability partnerships, unincorporated associations, trusts) may appear in any action or proceeding unless represented by an attorney permitted to practice before this Court under L.R. 83-2.1.” Local Rule 83-2.2.2. In addition, the Ninth Circuit has explicitly held that a non-attorney trustee may not

represent a trust pro se in federal court. See *C.E. Pope Equity Tr.*, 818 F.2d at 698 (explaining that a trustee “may not claim that his status as trustee includes the right to present arguments pro se in federal court”). The Ninth Circuit explained that “[b]ecause [the trustee] is not the actual beneficial owner of the claims being asserted by the Trusts (so far as one can tell from the record), [the trustee] cannot be viewed as a ‘party’ conducting his ‘own case personally’ within the meaning of Section 1654.” *Id.* at 697–98. Courts have interpreted this language in *C.E. Pope Equity Trust* as permitting a trustee to represent a trust pro se in federal court only where the trustee demonstrates that she is the “beneficial owner” of the trust's claims. See, e.g., *Simon*, 546 F.3d at 664 (explaining that the trustee in *C.E. Pope Equity Trust* was not permitted to represent the trust pro se because he “was not, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1654, a ‘party’ conducting his ‘own case personally’ as he was not the beneficial owner of the claims being asserted” (citing *C.E. Pope Equity Tr.*, 818 F.2d at 697–98)); *United States v. Molen*, 2011 WL 292150, at *6 (E.D. Cal. Jan. 31, 2011) (relying on *C.E. Pope Equity Trust* to state that “there is an exception to the general rule: an individual who is the trust's ‘beneficial owner’ may appear pro se on the trust's behalf”) (citing *C.E. Pope Equity Tr.*, 818 F.2d at 697–98). A court may strike or dismiss a complaint where a pro se individual improperly seeks to represent a trust pro se. See *C.E. Pope Equity Tr.*, 818 F.2d at 698 (where two cases had been consolidated for appeal, the Ninth Circuit affirmed one district court's dismissal of a complaint and another court's grant of a motion to strike a complaint where each complaint was filed by a pro se individual on behalf of a trust); see also *Aldridge v. United States*, 2011 WL 2516622, at *1 (E.D. Cal. June 23, 2011) (concluding that a complaint should be stricken based upon the plaintiff-trustee's pro se representation of a trust), adopted by 2011 WL 13242884 (E.D. Cal. Aug. 30, 2011); *Hall v. Wash. Mut. Bank*, 2010 WL 11549664, at *3 (C.D. Cal. July 7, 2010) (granting a defendant's motion to dismiss a complaint based upon the plaintiff-trustee's pro se representation of a trust). In this case, the Court has issued two orders to show cause (the “OSCs”) – on July 7, 2025 and July 14, 2025 – regarding Bowser pro se representation of Plaintiff. However, Bowser has failed to respond to either OSC or to obtain counsel for Plaintiff. Moreover, Bowser's failure to respond to the OSCs is not an isolated incident. To the contrary, Bowser has repeatedly filed documents that violated the Court's Standing Order, Self-Representation Order, and the Local Rules, and which provides the Court a separate ground for dismissing this action. See Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(b); see also *Yourish v. California Amplifier*, 191 F.3d 983, 986-988 (9th Cir. 1999); *Ferdik v. Bonzelet*, 963 F.2d 1258, 1260 (9th Cir. 1992). Accordingly, this action is DISMISSED without prejudice. IT IS SO ORDERED.