

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF
INDIANA, INDIANAPOLIS DIVISION

Michael Woods v. Jackson and C. Bishop

Woods · No. 1:24-cv-00821-KMB-RLY · Decided April 9, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Southern District of Indiana partially grants Defendants' second motion for a protective order concerning two Indiana Department of Correction restricted-housing post-order documents. The Court finds good cause to restrict access to security-sensitive information but requires Defendants to provide Plaintiff supervised, confidential-view-only access to specified redacted portions relevant to his claims regarding hygiene items, water, and religious materials. The Order is entered in Michael Woods's civil-rights action against Jackson and C. Bishop.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Southern District of Indiana, Indianapolis Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Kellie M. Barr
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Southern District of Indiana, Indianapolis Division
DECIDED	April 9, 2026
DOCKET	1:24-cv-00821-KMB-RLY
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendants filed a second motion for a protective order seeking to prevent or restrict Plaintiff's access to two Indiana Department of Correction post-order policies produced for in-camera review during discovery.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court independently determined whether good cause existed for a protective order and balanced the harm and security interests asserted by the moving parties against the importance of disclosure to the nonmoving party.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court order
PARTIES	Michael Woods v. Jackson, C. Bishop

TOPICS

discovery dispute

civil procedure

prisoners rights

civil rights

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

prisoner civil rights litigation

discovery

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Defendants established good cause under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 26(c) to restrict Plaintiff's access to the 2023 and 2024 restricted-housing-unit post orders.
2. Whether a protective order should cover the entirety of the post orders or instead be tailored through redaction and conditions governing Plaintiff's access.

HOLDINGS

1. Defendants established good cause to limit Plaintiff's access to portions of the post orders because the documents contained confidential prison-security information, including details concerning cell inspections and related procedures.
2. The protective order should be limited rather than applied to the entirety of the post orders; Defendants must provide redacted versions containing specified relevant portions, subject to confidential-view-only access, supervision, nondissemination restrictions, and an acknowledgment of the governing terms.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Rule 26(c) confers broad discretion on the trial court to decide when a protective order is appropriate and what degree of protection is required.”

“Before issuing the requested protective order, the Court must independently determine whether “good cause” exists to issue the order.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Woods alleges that Defendant Jackson deprived him of hygiene items for 13 days while he was on strip-cell status and of drinking water for eight days after that status ended. He also alleges that Defendant C. Bishop denied him access to religious materials after he left strip-cell status. Defendants sought protection from producing 2023 and 2024 post orders governing the restricted housing unit, asserting that disclosure of inspection, search, and investigative procedures could create prison safety and security risks.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Woods brought claims concerning alleged deprivation of hygiene items, drinking water, and religious materials while housed at Pendleton Correctional Facility. During discovery, Defendants sought protection from producing two restricted-housing-unit post-order policies, arguing that disclosure could create prison safety and security risks. The court reviewed the policies in camera and partially granted the motion, requiring production of redacted versions under supervised, confidential-access conditions.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Seattle Times Co. v. Rhinehart, 467 U.S. 20, 36 (1984)
- Pierson v. Indianapolis Power & Light Co., 205 F.R.D. 646, 647 (S.D. Ind. 2002)
- Citizens First Nat. Bank of Princeton v. Cincinnati Ins. Co., 178 F.3d 943, 945 (7th Cir. 1999)
- Range v. Brubaker, No. 3:07-CV-480, 2008 WL 5248983, at *3 (N.D. Ind. Dec. 16, 2008)
- Wells v. Israel, 854 F.2d 995, 998 (7th Cir. 1988)
- Overton v. Bazzetta, 539 U.S. 126, 132 (2003)

OPINION

WOODS

PER CURIAM.

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF INDIANA

INDIANAPOLIS DIVISION

MICHAEL WOODS,)

) Plaintiff,)) v.) No. 1:24-cv-00821-KMB-RLY)

JACKSON,)

C. BISHOP,)

) Defendants.)

ORDER GRANTING IN PART SECOND MOTION FOR PROTECTIVE ORDER

In this case Plaintiff Michael Woods alleges, as relevant here, that Defendant Jackson deprived him of hygiene items for 13 days while on "strip cell" status and drinking water for 8 days after he was removed from strip cell status. See dkt. 18 at 4 (Screening Order). He also alleges that Defendant Bishop deprived him of access to his religious materials after he was removed from strip cell status. Id. Defendants seek an order protecting them from producing two Indiana Department of Correction ("IDOC") policies in discovery: (1) Post Orders for PCF/IR-GCH Restricted Housing Unit dated April 14, 2023 ("2023 Post Orders"); and (2) Post Orders for PCF/IR-GCH Restricted Housing Unit dated June 13, 2024 ("2024 Post Orders"). Dkt. 43. Defendant filed an ex parte copy of the policies for the Court's in camera review. Dkt. 44. Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 26(b)(1) provides that: [p]arties may obtain discovery regarding any nonprivileged matter that is relevant to any party's claim or defense and proportional to the needs of the case, considering the importance of the issues at stake in the action, the amount in controversy, the parties' relative access to relevant information, the parties' resources, the importance of the discovery in resolving the issues, and whether the burden or expense of the proposed discovery outweighs its likely benefit. Information within this scope of discovery need

not be admissible in evidence to be discoverable. Fed. R. Civ. P. 26(b)(1). Rule 26 further states that a court may issue a protective order "for good cause ... to protect a party or person from annoyance, embarrassment, oppression, or undue burden or expense." Fed. R. Civ. P. 26(c)(1). This allowance includes prescribing alternate methods of conducting discovery and requiring that certain confidential information "be revealed only in a specified way," among other methods of protecting a party's interests during discovery. *Id.* The United States Supreme Court has long established that "Rule 26(c) confers broad discretion on the trial court to decide when a protective order is appropriate and what degree of protection is required." *Seattle Times Co. v. Rhinehart*, 467 U.S. 20, 36 (1984). Before issuing the requested protective order, the Court must independently determine whether "good cause" exists to issue the order. *Pierson v. Indianapolis Power & Light Co.*, 205 F.R.D. 646, 647 (S.D. Ind. 2002); see also *Citizens First Nat. Bank of Princeton v. Cincinnati Ins. Co.*, 178 F.3d 943, 945 (7th Cir. 1999); see also Fed. R. Civ. P. 26(c)(1)(G). When determining whether good cause exists for a protective order, the Court "must balance the interest of the parties, taking into account the harm to the party seeking the protective order and the importance of the disclosure to the non-moving party." *Range v. Brubaker*, No. 3:07-CV-480, 2008 WL 5248983, at *3 (N.D. Ind. Dec. 16, 2008) (cleaned up). In addition, when prison administrators assert that producing confidential documents would present a safety or security threat, courts give deference to their judgment. *Cf.*, e.g., *Wells v. Israel*, 854 F.2d 995, 998 (7th Cir. 1988); *Overton v. Bazzetta*, 539 U.S. 126, 132 (2003). Defendants argue that the cell inspection procedures in the two sets of Post Orders are considered confidential because they include information about how and when custody staff can perform inspections, searches, and examinations. Dkt. 43 at 3. They contend that, if an inmate became aware of these protocols, there would be an increased chance that the inmate could evade or manipulate a search, which would lead to safety and security issues. *Id.* They also argue that, if Plaintiff is given access to the Post Orders, "it is likely that this information would be shared with other offenders in the prison setting, increasing the risk of widespread assaults on offenders and staff, as well as increasing the risk of an organized riot or other disturbance." *Id.* They contend that inmates "could use information gleaned from these policies to circumvent the traditional investigative processes, increasing the likelihood of harm to anyone involved." *Id.* They submit an affidavit from IDOC attorney Robert Bugher to support their motion. Dkt. 43-1. The Court has conducted an in-camera review of the two sets of Post Orders. Defendants' arguments in favor of entering a protective order as to the entirety of the Post Orders are largely disconnected from the actual content of the Post Orders. The vast majority of the information in the Post Orders is unrelated to inspections, searches, examinations, and investigative processes. Instead, most of the information relates to the day-to-day operations of the GCH Unit at Pendleton Correctional Facility. Much of the information has no arguable relevance to this case, but some of it does—including information about what types of property are allowed when an inmate is on strip-cell status. Defendants have offered no argument as to why those portions of the Post Orders present a safety and security threat if Plaintiff is

allowed to see them, nor does the Court discern any such threat. That said, the Court recognizes Defendants' security concerns, particularly with respect to the portions of the Post Orders that have no relevance to this case and some of the details of the provisions that discuss cell inspections. Accordingly, the Court finds that there is good cause to limit Plaintiff's access to the Post Orders. To balance these conflicting interests, the Court partially grants Defendant's second motion for protective order, dkt. [43], consistent with the following:

1. Defendants shall have 7 days from the date of this Order to provide Plaintiff with "Confidential View Only" access to a redacted version of the 2023 Post Orders filed for the Court's in-camera review.¹ Defendant may redact everything but the following portions: (a) on page 3, starting at "d. Anytime an incarcerated individual is being sent to GCH" and stopping at the end of the list at the top of page 4 (the list that ends with "12. (2) Towels."); (2) on page 5, starting at "8. Cell Inspections" and ending at the end of section 8 (the sentence ending "then forwarded to the Custody Supervisor's Office for retention"); the text in the two sets of parentheses in section 8(b) may be redacted;

(3) on page 7, starting at paragraph V(B) (the paragraph starting "Incarcerated individuals placed in Disciplinary Restrictive Status Housing") and stopping at the end of paragraph V(D) (the paragraph ending "will also be supplied with a new toothbrush"); (4) on page 12, starting at paragraph M(1) (the paragraph that starts "Once secured in the shower") and stopping at the end of paragraph M(1) at the top of page 13 (the sentence that ends "until he surrenders his razor back to Staff"); (5) on page 13, paragraph M(2) (the paragraph that begins, "All person hygiene items shall be provided"); and (6) the unnumbered paragraph at the end of page 18 (the paragraph that starts "Post orders, like any written procedure").

2. Defendants shall have 7 days from the date of this Order to provide Plaintiff with "Confidential View Only" access to a redacted version of the 2024 Post Orders filed for the Court's in-camera review.² Defendant may redact everything but the following 1 The redacted document that Defendant provides Plaintiff shall be a copy of Docket No. 44-1. Should the document be relevant to any filings Plaintiff submits to the Court, he may cite to the document as Docket No. 44-1 with appropriate citations to the page numbers included in the original text of the document, as that document is already a part of the Court's record. He need not submit another copy of the document. 2 The redacted document that Defendant provides Plaintiff shall be a copy of Docket No. 44-2. Should the document be relevant to any filings Plaintiff submits to the Court, he may cite to the document as Docket No. 44-2 with appropriate citations to the page numbers included in the portions: (a) on page 3, starting at "d. Anytime an incarcerated individual is being sent to GCH" and stopping at the end of the list at the top of page 4 (the list that ends with "12. (2) Towels."); (2) on page 5, starting at "8. Cell Inspections" and stopping at the end of section 8 (the sentence ending "then forwarded to the Custody Supervisor's Office for retention"); the text in the two sets of parentheses in section 8(b) may be redacted; (3) on page 7, starting at paragraph V(B) (the paragraph starting "Incarcerated individuals placed in Disciplinary Restrictive Status

Housing") and stopping at the end of paragraph V(D) (the paragraph ending "will also be supplied with a new toothbrush"); (4) on page 12, starting at paragraph M(1) (the paragraph that starts "Once secured in the shower") and stopping at the end of paragraph M(1) at the top of page 13 (the sentence that ends "until he surrenders his razor back to Staff"); (5) on page 13, paragraph M(2) (the paragraph that begins, "All person hygiene items shall be provided"); and (6) the unnumbered paragraph at the end of page 18 (the paragraph that starts "Post orders, like any written procedure").

3. The redacted Post Orders shall be maintained by prison officials in Plaintiff's file.

Plaintiff shall have supervised access to the redacted documents to the extent necessary to analyze and develop his claims in this action. He is not permitted to retain any copies of the redacted documents. Outside of discussions with any future counsel, Plaintiff is prohibited from disseminating, communicating to anyone, or using information gained from viewing the redacted documents outside of this litigation. If Plaintiff original text of the document, as that document is already a part of the Court's record. He need not submit another copy of the document. subsequently obtains counsel, the redacted document shall subsequently be kept in a file maintained in confidence by such counsel and shall not be produced to Plaintiff.

4. Before any disclosure of the redacted documents to Plaintiff, he must first sign the acknowledgment to be bound to these terms that is attached hereto as Exhibit A. IT IS SO ORDERED. Date: 4/9/2026 Kellie M. Barr United States Magistrate Judge Southern District of Indiana Distribution:

MICHAEL WOODS

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PENDLETON - CF

PENDLETON CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

Electronic Service Participant — Court Only All counsel of record via CM/ECF