

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

Jonathan C. Coffer v. Judge Kliszewski, et al.

Coffer · No. 25-cv-01464-EKL · Decided December 31, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of California screened Jonathan Coffer's second amended 42 U.S.C. § 1983 complaint concerning his 2007 commitment to the California Youth Authority. The court held that the defendant judge was entitled to absolute judicial immunity and the defendant prosecutor was entitled to absolute prosecutorial immunity. The court denied leave to amend and dismissed the action with prejudice for failure to state a claim.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Eumi K. Lee
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
DECIDED	December 31, 2025
DOCKET	25-cv-01464-EKL
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Screening of a prisoner's second amended complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, the court must identify cognizable claims and dismiss claims that are frivolous or malicious, fail to state a claim, or seek monetary relief from an immune defendant. The court also applied the Rule 8(a)(2) and plausibility standards from Twombly and Iqbal, construing the pro se pleading liberally.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unknown

TOPICS

- section 1983
- prisoners rights
- civil procedure
- damages

PRACTICE AREAS

- civil rights
- prisoner civil rights
- federal civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the claims for damages against Judge Kliszewski were barred by absolute judicial immunity.
2. Whether the claims for damages against Assistant District Attorney Migas were barred by absolute prosecutorial immunity.
3. Whether Coffey should receive further leave to amend after the court previously granted leave to amend.

HOLDINGS

1. A state judge is absolutely immune from liability for damages under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 for acts performed in a judicial capacity, and sentencing Coffey during juvenile proceedings was a judicial act. The claims against Judge Kliszewski therefore failed to state a claim and were dismissed without leave to amend.
2. A prosecutor is absolutely immune from liability for conduct undertaken as an advocate for the State and intimately associated with the judicial phase of a criminal or juvenile delinquency proceeding. Advocating for a specific disposition in juvenile proceedings falls within that protected function, so the claims against Migas were dismissed without leave to amend.
3. The action was dismissed with prejudice for failure to state a claim, and further leave to amend was denied because the defects caused by judicial and prosecutorial immunity could not be cured by amendment.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“A state judge has absolute immunity from civil liability for damages for acts performed in his judicial capacity.” (Section III.A)

“Advocating for a specific disposition during juvenile criminal proceedings, however, is undoubtedly ‘intimately associated with the judicial phase of the [juvenile delinquency] process.’” (Section III.B)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Coffey alleged that in 2007 Judge Kliszewski sentenced him to eight years in the California Youth Authority. He alleged that Assistant District Attorney Maryann Migas deliberately sent him to the California Youth Authority knowing the commitment was illegal. Coffey claimed that learning of the allegedly illegal commitment caused him to stop eating and cut his wrists, and he sought monetary damages from both defendants.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Jonathan C. Coffey, proceeding pro se and as a prisoner, filed a civil-rights action challenging his 2007 commitment to the California Youth Authority and seeking damages from Judge Kliszewski and Assistant District Attorney Migas. The court previously dismissed the complaint with leave to amend; Coffey filed amended complaints and a letter requesting further leave to amend. The court screened the second amended complaint, denied further leave to amend, dismissed the action with prejudice, and directed the Clerk to enter judgment and close the file.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- *Balistreri v. Pacifica Police Dep't*, 901 F.2d 696, 699 (9th Cir.)
- *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555, 570 (2007)
- *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 679 (2009)
- *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988)
- *Lemire v. Cal. Dep't of Corrections & Rehabilitation*, 726 F.3d 1062, 1074 (9th Cir.)
- *Leer v. Murphy*, 844 F.2d 628, 633-34 (9th Cir.)
- *Pierson v. Ray*, 386 U.S. 547, 553-55 (1967)
- *Mitchell v. Forsyth*, 472 U.S. 511, 526 (1985)
- *Stump v. Sparkman*, 435 U.S. 349, 362 (1978)
- *Simmons v. Sacramento Cnty. Super. Ct.*, 318 F.3d 1156, 1161 (9th Cir.)
- *Butz v. Economou*, 438 U.S. 478, 511 (1978)
- *Burton v. Infinity Cap. Mgmt.*, 862 F.3d 740, 747 (9th Cir.)
- *In re C.H.*, 53 Cal. 4th 94 (2011)
- *Wheeler v. City of Santa Clara*, 894 F.3d 1046, 1059 (9th Cir.)
- *Imbler v. Patchman*, 424 U.S. 409, 430-31 (1976)
- *Cousins v. Lockyer*, 568 F.3d 1063, 1068-69 (9th Cir.)
- *Jackson v. Barnes*, 749 F.3d 755, 766 (9th Cir.)
- *Gilliam v. Napa Cnty.*, 73 Fed. Appx. 206 (9th Cir.)
- *Miller v. Gammie*, 335 F.3d 889, 898 (9th Cir.)

OPINION

1 2 3 4 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT 5 NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA 6 7
JONATHAN C. COFFER, Case No. 25-cv-01464-EKL 8 Plaintiff, ORDER SCREENING
SECOND AMENDED COMPLAINT, DENYING 9 v. LEAVE TO AMEND, AND DISMISSING
MATTER WITH 10 JUDGE KLISZEWSKI, et al., PREJUDICE Defendants. Re: ECF No. 19 11
12 13 Plaintiff Jonathan Christopher Coffe, a pro se prisoner, filed the instant civil rights lawsuit
14 challenging his 2007 commitment to the California Youth Authority (“CYA”).

ECF No. 18. The 15 Court previously screened Coffe’s complaint and dismissed it with leave to
amend. See ECF 16 No. 16. Coffe subsequently filed two amended complaints and a letter
requesting further leave to 17 amend. See ECF Nos. 17, 18, 19.

The second amended complaint is now before the Court for 18 screening pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §
1915A. For the reasons stated below, the Court DISMISSES 19 Coffe’s complaint and DENIES
his request for leave to amend. 20 I. LEGAL STANDARDS 21 A. Standard of Review 22 Federal

courts engage in a preliminary screening of cases in which prisoners seek redress 23 from a governmental entity or officer or employee of a governmental entity.

28 U.S.C. 24 § 1915A(a). In its review, the Court must identify any cognizable claims and dismiss any claims, 25 which are frivolous or malicious, fail to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seek 26 monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. Id. § 1915A(b)(1)-(2). Pro se 27 pleadings must be liberally construed. *Balistreri v. Pacifica Police Dep't*, 901 F.2d 696, 699 (9th 1 Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8(a)(2) requires only “a short and plain statement of the 2 claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.” Although a complaint “does not need detailed 3 factual allegations,... a plaintiff’s obligation to provide the ‘grounds’ of his ‘entitle[ment] to 4 relief’ requires more than labels and conclusions, and a formulaic recitation of the elements of a 5 cause of action will not do....

Factual allegations must be enough to raise a right to relief above 6 the speculative level.” *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007) (citations omitted). 7 A complaint must proffer “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” Id. 8 at 570. “While legal conclusions can provide the framework of a complaint, they must be 9 supported by factual allegations.

When there are well-pleaded factual allegations, a court should 10 assume their veracity and then determine whether they plausibly give rise to an entitlement to 11 relief.” *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 679 (2009). 12 B. Section 1983 13 To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege that: (1) a right secured by 14 the Constitution or laws of the United States was violated, and (2) the alleged deprivation was 15 committed by a person acting under the color of state law.

West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988). 16 Liability may be imposed on an individual defendant under Section 1983 if the plaintiff can show 17 that the defendant’s actions actually and proximately caused the deprivation of a federally 18 protected right. *Lemire v. Cal. Dep’t of Corrections & Rehabilitation*, 726 F.3d 1062, 1074 (9th 19 Cir. 2013); *Leer v. Murphy*, 844 F.2d 628, 634 (9th Cir.

1988). A person deprives another of a 20 constitutional right within the meaning of Section 1983 if he does an affirmative act, participates 21 in another’s affirmative act, or fails to perform an act that he is legally required to do, causing the 22 deprivation of which the plaintiff complains. *Leer*, 844 F.2d at 633. 23 II. PLAINTIFF’S ALLEGATIONS 24 *Coffer’s* second amended complaint alleges that, in 2007, Judge Kliszewski of the 25 Alameda County Superior Court sentenced *Coffer* to eight years in CYA.

ECF No. 1 at 3. He 26 also alleges that Assistant District Attorney Maryann Migas “deliberately sent [him] to CYA 27 knowing that was an illegal commitment.” ECF No. 18 at 3. *Coffer* asserts

that the sentence 1 finding out about his illegal commitment caused him to stop eating and cut his own wrists. Id. at 2 3-4. He seeks monetary damages against Judge Kliszewski and Migas.

Id. at 5. 3 III. ANALYSIS 4 The Court screens his claims against each defendant below. 5 A. Claims Against Judge Kliszewski 6 A state judge has absolute immunity from civil liability for damages for acts performed in 7 his judicial capacity. See *Pierson v. Ray*, 386 U.S. 547, 553-55 (1967) (applying judicial 8 immunity to actions under Section 1983). Judicial immunity is an immunity from suit for 9 damages, not just from an ultimate assessment of damages.

See *Mitchell v. Forsyth*, 472 U.S. 511, 10 526 (1985). Whether an act by a judge is a judicial one relates to (1) the nature and function of the 11 act and not the act itself, i.e., whether it is a function normally performed by a judge, and (2) the 12 expectations of the parties, i.e., whether they dealt with the judge in his judicial capacity. *Stump v. 13 Sparkman*, 435 U.S. 349, 362 (1978); see also *Simmons v. Sacramento Cnty.*

Super. Ct., 318 F.3d 14 1156, 1161 (9th Cir. 2003) (judge absolutely immune for entering default judgment against 15 prisoner who was not permitted to attend civil trial because entry of default judgment in a pending 16 civil case is unquestionably a judicial act). “Judges have absolute immunity not because of their 17 particular location within the Government but because of the special nature of their 18 responsibilities.” *Butz v. Economou*, 438 U.S. 478, 511 (1978).

Absolute immunity, therefore, “is 19 not reserved solely for judges, but extends to nonjudicial officers for all claims relating to the 20 exercise of judicial functions.” *Burton v. Infinity Cap. Mgmt.*, 862 F.3d 740, 747 (9th Cir. 2017) 21 (internal quotations and citations omitted). 22 As the party responsible for sentencing Coffey during his juvenile proceedings, Kliszewski 23 is entitled to absolute immunity.

In his second amended complaint, Coffey cites to *In re C.H.*, 53 24 Cal. 4th 94 (2011), and argues that judges or other bench officers lose their immunity when they 25 act in excess of their jurisdiction. ECF No. 18 at 3.

The cited case, however, does not discuss the 26 issue of judicial immunity nor a plaintiff’s ability to pursue a civil rights claim for judicial acts. 27 Thus, whether Kliszewski is a judge or other bench officer, Coffey cannot obtain money damages 1 unquestionably judicial in nature and were performed in a judicial capacity. Coffey’s second 2 amended complaint does not address this issue, and he has not otherwise shown that he can 3 address these deficiencies to state a claim.¹ Coffey therefore fails to state a claim for relief.

4 Because any amendment would be futile, the claims against Kliszewski are DISMISSED without 5 leave to amend. See *Wheeler v. City of Santa Clara*, 894 F.3d 1046, 1059 (9th Cir. 2018) (“Leave 6 to amend may be denied if the proposed amendment is futile or would be subject to dismissal.”). 7 B. Claims Against Migas 8 Prosecutors have absolute immunity for any conduct in

“pursuing a criminal prosecution” 9 insofar as they were acting as “advocate[s] for the State” and their actions were “intimately 10 associated with the judicial phase of the criminal process.” Imbler v. Patchman, 424 U.S. 409, 11 430 (1976); see id. at 430-31 (prosecutor absolutely immune from liability for the knowing use of 12 false testimony at trial); Cousins v. Lockyer, 568 F.3d 1063, 1068-69 (9th Cir.

2009) (California 13 Attorney General absolutely immune from liability for wrongful imprisonment for failing to notify 14 the court and prison officials of change in law entitling an inmate to release because this involves 15 petitioning the court and is prosecutorial, rather than investigative or administrative, in nature); 16 Jackson v. Barnes, 749 F.3d 755, 766 (9th Cir.

2014) (prosecutor entitled to absolute immunity for 17 her statements at trial, her closing argument, her use of DNA, and her reliance on a third party’s 18 perjured testimony). Prosecutorial immunity also applies to prosecutorial actions in juvenile 19 delinquency court. See Gilliam v. Napa Cnty., 73 Fed. Appx. 206 (9th Cir. 2003) (citing Miller v. 20 Gammie, 335 F.3d 889, 898 (9th Cir.

2003)). 21 Coffey alleges that Migas “deliberately sent [him] to CYA knowing that was an illegal 22 commitment.” ECF No. 18 at 3. Advocating for a specific disposition during juvenile criminal 23 proceedings, however, is undoubtedly “intimately associated with the judicial phase of the 24 [juvenile delinquency] process.” Imbler, 424 U.S. at 430. Migas is absolutely immune from a 25 26 1 In his letter requesting leave to amend his complaint, Coffey states that he can “properly amend [his] complaint” by “show[ing] that a private party conspired with state officials to deprive others 27 of constitutional rights.” The letter appears to be intended for a different pending case, Case 1 Section 1983 lawsuit for the challenged conduct.

Because Coffey has not shown that he can 2 amend the claim to address the issue of prosecutorial immunity, the claim is DISMISSED without 3 leave to amend. See Wheeler, 894 F.3d at 1059. 4 CONCLUSION 5 1. Coffey’s request for leave to amend (ECF No. 19) is DENIED. 6 2. This action is DISMISSED with prejudice for failure to state a claim. 7 3.

The Clerk is requested to enter judgment and close the file. 8 IT IS SO ORDERED. 9 |} Dated: 12/31/2025 10 11 umi K. Lee 12 United States District Judge 15 16 = 17 Z 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28