

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Eberly v. Harris

No. 2:25-cv-1002-JDP (P), United States District Court for the Eastern District of California (August 22, 2025)

SUMMARY

The court recommends dismissing a state prisoner’s amended § 1983 complaint because his claims challenge the validity of an underlying murder conviction and must be pursued through habeas corpus rather than a civil rights action. The order also grants an extension of time, denies without prejudice motions for appointed counsel and post-conviction DNA testing, and directs the Clerk to provide a federal habeas form.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Jeremy D. Peterson
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	August 22, 2025
DOCKET	2:25-cv-1002-JDP (P)
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	A state prisoner filed a first amended complaint under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 challenging the validity of his state murder conviction and related matters. The magistrate judge screened the complaint and issued findings and recommendations recommending dismissal without leave to amend; the recommendation was submitted to an assigned district judge for review.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Screening under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A; failure-to-state-a-claim review under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8(a)(2) and the plausibility standard.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential magistrate judge findings and recommendations; not a final district-court judgment in the source
PARTIES	Gary Alan Eberly v. Kamala Devi Harris, et al.

TOPICS

section 1983

federal habeas corpus

prisoners rights

post-conviction relief

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights

prisoner litigation

habeas corpus

civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether a state prisoner may pursue claims under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 when those claims directly or indirectly challenge the validity of an uninvalidated conviction or ongoing sentence.
2. Whether plaintiff's first amended complaint stated a cognizable § 1983 claim under the prisoner-screening and pleading standards.
3. Whether plaintiff's motions to appoint counsel and for post-conviction DNA testing should be granted.

HOLDINGS

1. Claims by a state prisoner that attack the validity of an ongoing conviction or sentence must be brought, if at all, in a habeas action rather than under § 1983.
2. The amended complaint failed to state a cognizable § 1983 claim because its allegations challenged the validity of plaintiff's uninvalidated state conviction.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“such claims that attack, either directly or indirectly, the validity of a conviction that has not been expunged, must be brought in a habeas action.” (at 1)

“The Court has long held that habeas is the exclusive vehicle for claims brought by state prisoners that fall within the core of habeas, and such claims may not be brought in a § 1983 action.” (at 2)

“It is RECOMMENDED that the first amended complaint, ECF No. 17, be DISMISSED without leave to amend for failure to state a viable section 1983 claim.” (at 2)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff is a state prisoner convicted of murdering his wife. He alleges that her death was a suicide and that his conviction was illegally obtained. His amended complaint asserted nineteen claims concerning the conviction, including alleged suppression of evidence, witness tampering, and ineffective assistance of counsel.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff previously received a screening order explaining that claims attacking the validity of his conviction or ongoing sentence must be pursued in habeas rather than under § 1983. Plaintiff filed a timely first amended complaint asserting nineteen claims, including suppression of evidence, witness tampering, and ineffective assistance of counsel. The court recommended dismissal for failure to state a viable § 1983 claim, denied motions to appoint counsel and for post-conviction DNA testing without prejudice, granted an extension of time, and directed that a federal habeas form be provided for use in a separate action.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678-79 (2009)
- Kobold v. Good Samaritan Reg'l Med. Ctr., 832 F.3d 1024, 1038 (9th Cir. 2016)
- Nagrampa v. MailCoups, Inc., 469 F.3d 1257, 1264 n.2 (9th Cir. 2006) (en banc)
- Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972) (per curiam)
- Hayes v. Idaho Corr. Ctr., 849 F.3d 1204, 1208 (9th Cir. 2017)
- Bruns v. Nat'l Credit Union Admin., 122 F.3d 1251, 1257 (9th Cir. 1997)
- Ivey v. Bd. of Regents, 673 F.2d 266, 268 (9th Cir. 1982)
- Nettles v. Grounds, 830 F.3d 922, 927 (9th Cir. 2016)
- Heck v. Humphrey, 512 U.S. 477, 487 (1994)
- Turner v. Duncan, 158 F.3d 449, 455 (9th Cir. 1998)
- Martinez v. Yist, 951 F.2d 1153 (9th Cir. 1991)

OPINION

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT 9 FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA 10 11 GARY ALAN EBERLY, Case No. 2:25-cv-1002-JDP (P) 12 Plaintiff, 13 v.
ORDER; FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 14 KAMALA DEVI HARRIS, et al., 15
Defendants, 16 17 Plaintiff, a state prisoner, brings this action alleging that defendants violated his
rights in 18 connection with his state criminal conviction.

ECF No. 17 at 4 (listing suppression of evidence, 19 witness tampering, ineffective assistance of
counsel as claims). As I explained in my previous 20 screening order, such claims that attack,
either directly or indirectly, the validity of a conviction 21 that has not been expunged, must be
brought in a habeas action.

Accordingly, I now recommend 22 that this action be dismissed for failure to state a cognizable
section 1983 claim. If plaintiff 23 wishes to file a separate habeas action attacking his conviction,
he may do so. 24 Screening Order 25 I. Screening and Pleading Requirements 26 A federal court
must screen a prisoner's complaint that seeks relief against a governmental 27 entity, officer, or
employee.

See 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(a). The court must identify any cognizable 28 claims and dismiss any
portion of the complaint that is frivolous or malicious, fails to state a 1 claim upon which relief
may be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is 2 immune from such relief. See

28 U.S.C. §§ 1915A(b)(1), (2). 3 A complaint must contain a short and plain statement that plaintiff is entitled to relief, 4 Fed.

R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2), and provide “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its 5 face,” *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007). The plausibility standard does not 6 require detailed allegations, but legal conclusions do not suffice. See *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 7 662, 678 (2009). If the allegations “do not permit the court to infer more than the mere 8 possibility of misconduct,” the complaint states no claim.

Id. at 679. The complaint need not 9 identify “a precise legal theory.” *Kobold v. Good Samaritan Reg’l Med. Ctr.*, 832 F.3d 1024, 10 1038 (9th Cir. 2016). Instead, what plaintiff must state is a “claim”—a set of “allegations that 11 give rise to an enforceable right to relief.” *Nagrampa v. MailCoups, Inc.*, 469 F.3d 1257, 1264 12 n.2 (9th Cir. 2006) (en banc) (citations omitted).

13 The court must construe a pro se litigant’s complaint liberally. See *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 14 U.S. 519, 520 (1972) (per curiam). The court may dismiss a pro se litigant’s complaint “if it 15 appears beyond doubt that the plaintiff can prove no set of facts in support of his claim which 16 would entitle him to relief.” *Hayes v. Idaho Corr. Ctr.*, 849 F.3d 1204, 1208 (9th Cir.

2017). 17 However, “a liberal interpretation of a civil rights complaint may not supply essential elements 18 of the claim that were not initially pled.” *Bruns v. Nat’l Credit Union Admin.*, 122 F.3d 1251, 19 1257 (9th Cir. 1997) (quoting *Ivey v. Bd. of Regents*, 673 F.2d 266, 268 (9th Cir. 1982)). 20 II. Analysis 21 Plaintiff’s complaint lists nineteen claims, all of which relate to a criminal conviction for 22 murder of his wife.

ECF No. 17 at 83. He maintains that her death was a suicide and that his 23 conviction was illegally obtained.¹ *Id.* at 10. In my previous screening order, I informed plaintiff 24 that challenges to the validity of any ongoing prison sentence must be brought, if at all, in a 25 habeas petition. See *Nettles v. Grounds*, 830 F.3d 922, 927 (9th Cir. 2016) (“Challenges to the 26 27 1 The complaint does not contain a straightforward description of the procedural background leading to the claims at issue.

I have done my best to infer the basics from the 28 complaint and the documents plaintiff has chosen to attach thereto. 1 validity of any confinement or to particulars affecting its duration are the province of habeas 2 corpus... [t]he Court has long held that habeas is the exclusive vehicle for claims brought by 3 state prisoners that fall within the core of habeas, and such claims may not be brought in a § 1983 4 action.”); see also *Heck v. Humphrey*, 512 U.S. 477, 487 (1994) (“A claim for damages bearing 5 that relationship to a conviction or sentence that has not been so invalidated is not cognizable 6 under § 1983.”).

His latest complaint makes no showing that his claims should proceed in a 7 section 1983 action; plaintiff may file a separate habeas petition if he wishes to pursue his claims. 8 It is ORDERED

that: 9 1. The Clerk of Court shall assign a district judge to rule on these findings and 10 recommendations. 11 2. Plaintiff's motion for extension of time, ECF No. 14, is GRANTED, and his first amended 12 complaint is deemed timely.

13 3. Plaintiff's motion to appoint counsel, ECF No. 19, and motion for post-conviction DNA 14 testing, ECF No. 20, are denied without prejudice. If these recommendations are not adopted, he 15 may renew these motions. 16 4.

The Clerk of Court shall also send plaintiff a federal habeas form. He is advised NOT to 17 file the form in this action. If he wishes to pursue habeas claims, they must be brought in a 18 separate case. 19 It is RECOMMENDED that the first amended complaint, ECF No. 17, be DISMISSED 20 without leave to amend for failure to state a viable section 1983 claim.

21 These findings and recommendations are submitted to the United States District Judge 22 assigned to the case, pursuant to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1). Within fourteen days of 23 service of these findings and recommendations, any party may file written objections with the 24 court and serve a copy on all parties. Any such document should be captioned "Objections to 25 Magistrate Judge's Findings and Recommendations," and any response shall be served and 26 filed 26 within fourteen days of service of the objections.

The parties are advised that failure to file 27 objections within the specified time may waive the right to appeal the District Court's order. See 28 1 Turner v. Duncan, 158 F.3d 449, 455 (9th Cir. 1998); Martinez v. Yist, 951 F.2d 1153 (9th Cir. 2 | 1991). 3 4 IT IS SO ORDERED. Dated: _ August 22, 2025 q—— 6 JEREMY D. PETERSON 7 UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28