

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
TENNESSEE

Charles Wallis, Christopher B. Goins, and Mark Wells v. Jefferson
County Jail Staff, J. Coffey, and Amber Manning

Wallis · No. 3:26-CV-247-TAV-DCP · Decided June 1, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee considers a pro se 42 U.S.C. § 1983 complaint challenging 23-hour-per-day lockdown conditions at the Jefferson County Jail. The court dismisses the two additional plaintiffs who did not sign the complaint, grants Charles Wallis leave to proceed in forma pauperis, and dismisses the action without prejudice for failure to state a claim. The court concludes that 23-hour lockdown confinement, as alleged, does not constitute an atypical and significant hardship or an extreme deprivation of basic necessities.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Thomas A. Varlan
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee
DECIDED	June 1, 2026
DOCKET	3:26-CV-247-TAV-DCP
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Pro se prisoner civil-rights action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 screened on the court's own initiative under the Prison Litigation Reform Act; the court also considered the signed plaintiff's motion to proceed in forma pauperis.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court applied the PLRA screening standards under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) and 1915A, evaluating whether the complaint was frivolous, malicious, failed to state a plausible claim, or sought relief from an immune defendant. Pro se allegations were liberally construed.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court memorandum opinion and order; precedential status unknown

PARTIES

Charles Wallis, Christopher B. Goins, Mark Wells v. Jefferson County Jail Staff, J. Coffey, Amber Manning

TOPICS

prisoners rights section 1983 joinder pleadings civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

prisoner civil rights constitutional law federal civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether prisoners who did not sign the complaint or seek in forma pauperis status could proceed as plaintiffs in the same action.
2. Whether the complaint stated a plausible constitutional claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 based on confinement in a 23-hours-per-day lockdown and resulting depression-medication use.
3. Whether Wallis should be permitted to amend the complaint to supply a demand for relief.

HOLDINGS

1. Goins and Wells could not proceed as plaintiffs because they did not sign the complaint or otherwise demonstrate that they were actively pursuing the action; the court therefore dismissed them from the case.
2. The complaint failed to state a plausible claim under § 1983 because confinement to a cell for 23 hours per day, without additional facts showing an extreme deprivation or atypical and significant hardship, did not establish a constitutional violation.
3. The court declined to permit amendment because the complaint's substantive allegations failed to state a plausible claim even apart from its failure to include a demand for relief.
4. Wallis was granted leave to proceed in forma pauperis, but he remained responsible for the \$350 civil filing fee, payable through the statutory inmate-account collection procedure.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Specifically, as set forth above, Plaintiff Wallis’s only substantive claim is that he is confined to his cell for 23 hours per day. However, this type of confinement “does not rise to the level of a constitutional magnitude.””

“Accordingly, the complaint fails to state a plausible claim for violation of § 1983, and this action will be DISMISSED.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Wallis alleged that the Jefferson County Jail had confined him to a 23-hours-in-cell, 1-hour-out-of-cell lockdown since December 4, 2025, despite the jail rule book not expressly providing for that schedule. He alleged that the

lockdown contributed to depression medication use and that other jails operated differently. The complaint named the jail staff, the county sheriff, and a lieutenant but did not request specific relief.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The complaint listed three prisoners as plaintiffs, but only Charles Wallis signed the complaint and sought in forma pauperis status. The court treated Wallis as the sole plaintiff, dismissed Goins and Wells from the action, granted Wallis leave to proceed in forma pauperis subject to statutory fee collection, and dismissed the complaint without prejudice for failure to state a claim.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- United Mine Workers of Am. v. Gibbs, 383 U.S. 715, 724 (1966)
- McLaurin v. Bagley, No. 2:17-CV-11263, 2017 WL 1738031, at *5 (E.D. Mich. May 4, 2017)
- Benson v. O’Brian, 179 F.3d 1014 (6th Cir. 1999)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662 (2009)
- Bell Atlantic Corporation v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544 (2007)
- Hill v. Lappin, 630 F.3d 468, 470-71 (6th Cir. 2010)
- Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972)
- Argue v. Hofmeyer, 80 F. App’x 427, 429 (6th Cir. 2003)
- Sandin v. Conner, 515 U.S. 472, 484-86 (1995)
- Hudson v. McMillan, 503 U.S. 1, 8-9 (1992)

OPINION

Wallis

PER CURIAM.

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

EASTERN DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE

CHARLES WALLIS, CHRISTOPHER)

B. GOINS, and MARK WELLS,)) Plaintiffs,)) v.) No. 3:26-CV-247-TAV-DCP)

JEFFERSON COUNTY JAIL STAFF,)

J. COFFEY, and AMBER MANNING,)

) Defendants.)

MEMORANDUM OPINION AND ORDER

Now before the Court is a pro se complaint filed pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 that lists three Plaintiffs and challenges the fact that the Jefferson County Jail has been on “23-1” lockdown since Plaintiff Charles Wallis, the only Plaintiff who signed the complaint, arrived in the jail on

December 4, 2025 [Doc. 2]. Also before the Court is Plaintiff Wallis's motion for leave to proceed in forma pauperis [Doc. 1]. For the reasons set forth below, the Court considers Plaintiff Wallis as the only Plaintiff herein, Plaintiff Wallis's motion [Doc. 1] will be GRANTED, and this action will be DISMISSED because the complaint fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted under § 1983.

I. PLAINTIFFS

First, while the complaint lists three plaintiffs in the style of the case [Doc. 2, p. 1], for the reasons set forth below, the Court considers Plaintiff Wallis to be the only plaintiff herein and will therefore dismiss Plaintiffs Christopher Goins and Mark Wells. While the joinder of parties is "strongly encouraged" for purposes of judicial economy and fairness where it is appropriate, *United Mine Workers of Am. v. Gibbs*, 383 U.S. 715, 724 (1966), courts have recognized that there are significant practical problems with allowing multiple prisoners to file a single complaint. See, e.g., *McLaurin v. Bagley*, No. 2:17-CV-11263, 2017 WL 1738031, at *5 (E.D. Mich. May 4, 2017) (noting that there are "'pervasive impracticalities associated with multiple-plaintiff prisoner litigation, which militates against permissive joinder'" even where Rule 20(a) permits it, including the "'need for each plaintiff to sign every pleading, and the consequent possibilities that documents may be changed as they are circulated'" as well as the fact that prisoner litigants are "notably transitory") (citations omitted). As the Court noted above, only Plaintiff Wallis signed the complaint [Id. at 5], even though Rule 11(a) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure requires that a party not represented by counsel personally sign every pleading, written motion, or other paper filed in the Court. Also, only Plaintiff Wallis filed a motion for leave to proceed in forma pauperis [Doc. 1]. Accordingly, due to the myriad difficulties with multiple prisoner plaintiffs proceeding together in one case, and as it is apparent that Plaintiff Wallis is the only named Plaintiff actively pursuing this case, the Court DISMISSES Plaintiffs Goins and Wells.

II. FILING FEE

As Plaintiff Wallis's financial documents demonstrate that he cannot pay the filing fee in a lump sum, his motion for leave to proceed in forma pauperis [Doc. 1] is GRANTED. Plaintiff is ASSESSED the civil filing fee of \$350.00. The custodian of Plaintiff's inmate trust account is DIRECTED to submit to the Clerk, U.S. District Court, 800 Market Street, Suite 130, Knoxville, Tennessee 37902, as an initial partial payment, whichever is the greater of: (a) twenty percent (20%) of the average monthly deposits to Plaintiff's inmate trust account; or (b) twenty percent (20%) of the average monthly balance in his inmate trust account for the six-month period preceding the filing of the complaint. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1)(A) and (B). Thereafter, the custodian of Plaintiff's inmate trust account shall submit twenty percent (20%) of his preceding monthly income (or income credited to his trust account for the preceding month), but only when such monthly income exceeds ten dollars (\$10.00), until the full filing fee of three hundred and fifty dollars (\$350.00) has been paid to the Clerk. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1914(a), 1915(b)(2). To ensure compliance with this fee collection procedure, the Clerk is DIRECTED to provide a copy of this

memorandum opinion and order to the custodian of inmate accounts at the institution where Plaintiff is now confined and the Court's financial deputy. This order shall be placed in Plaintiff's prison file and follow him if he is transferred to another correctional institution.

III. SCREENING STANDARD

Under the Prison Litigation Reform Act ("PLRA"), district courts must screen prisoner complaints and sua sponte dismiss any claims that are frivolous or malicious, fail to state a claim for relief, or are against a defendant who is immune. See, e.g., 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) and 1915A; *Benson v. O'Brian*, 179 F.3d 1014 (6th Cir. 1999). The dismissal standard the Supreme Court set forth in *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662 (2009) and *Bell Atlantic Corporation v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544 (2007) "governs dismissals for failure to state a claim under [28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) and 1915A] because the relevant statutory language tracks the language in Rule 12(b)(6)" of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. *Hill v. Lappin*, 630 F.3d 468, 470–71 (6th Cir. 2010). Thus, to survive an initial review under the PLRA, a complaint "must contain sufficient factual matter, accepted as true, to 'state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.'" *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678 (quoting *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 570). Formulaic and conclusory recitations of the elements of a claim and allegations that do not raise a plaintiff's right to relief "above a speculative level" fail to state a plausible claim. *Id.* at 681; *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 570. However, courts liberally construe pro se pleadings and hold them to a less stringent standard than lawyer-drafted pleadings. *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972). A claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 requires a plaintiff to establish that a person acting under color of state law deprived him a federal right. 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

IV. ALLEGATIONS

According to the complaint, the Jefferson County Jail has been on a "23-1" lockdown since Plaintiff Wallis arrived on December 4, 2025, even though "the Rule book" does not state that jail will operate on this schedule [Doc. 2, pp. 2– 4]. Also, when Plaintiff Wallis filed a form stating that he was on "depression medication" due to this lockdown, that nothing had changed since the hiring of a new officer, and that other jails are not on lockdown, Defendant Amber Manning responded that the jail is "a 23/1 locked down facility," that only trustees are allowed out more than one hour per day, and that "it takes a lot to become a trustee" in the jail [*Id.* at 4]. The complaint names the Jefferson County Jail Staff, Jefferson County Sheriff Jeff Coffey, and Lieutenant Amber Manning as Defendants [*Id.* at 3]. The complaint does not have a request for relief but instead states that a newly opened jail in Morristown is not on "23-1" lockdown and asks why Jefferson County is on such a lockdown in the portion of the complaint designated for the requested relief [*Id.* at 5].

V. ANALYSIS

The Court first notes that the complaint fails to comport with general pleading rules, as it does not contain "a demand for the relief sought[.]" Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(3). The Court will not permit Plaintiff Wallis an opportunity to amend the complaint to include his requested relief, however,

because his only substantive allegations fail to state a plausible claim for relief. Specifically, as set forth above, Plaintiff Wallis's only substantive claim is that he is confined to his cell for 23 hours per day. However, this type of confinement "does not rise to the level of a constitutional magnitude." *Argue v. Hofmeyer*, 80 F. App'x 427, 429 (6th Cir. 2003) (finding that 23/1 "confinement does not impose an atypical and significant hardship" (citing *Sandin v. Conner*, 515 U.S. 472, 484–86 (1995))). Moreover, while Plaintiff Wallis also states in the complaint that this 23/1 confinement has caused him to take medication for depression, he provides no facts about the conditions his confinement from which the Court could find that they create an "extreme deprivation[]" that denies him "the minimal civilized measure of life's necessities," such that they could plausibly violate his constitutional rights. *Hudson v. McMillan*, 503 U.S. 1, 8–9 (1992) (citations and quotations omitted). Accordingly, the complaint fails to state a plausible claim for violation of § 1983, and this action will be DISMISSED.

VI. CONCLUSION

For the reasons set forth above:

1. Plaintiffs Goins and Wells are DISMISSED;
2. Plaintiff Wallis's motion for leave to proceed in forma pauperis [Doc. 1] is GRANTED;
3. Plaintiff is ASSESSED the civil filing fee of \$350.00;
4. The custodian of Plaintiff's inmate trust accounts is DIRECTED to submit the filing fee to the Clerk in the manner set forth above;
5. The Clerk is DIRECTED to provide a copy of this memorandum and order and the accompanying judgment order to the custodian of inmate accounts at the institution where Plaintiff is now confined and the Court's financial deputy;
6. Even liberally construing Plaintiff's complaint in his favor, it fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted under § 1983;
7. Accordingly, this action will be DISMISSED without prejudice for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) and 1915A; and
8. The Court CERTIFIES that any appeal from this action would not be taken in good faith and would be totally frivolous. See Rule 24 of the Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure. IT IS SO ORDERED. AN APPROPRIATE JUDGMENT ORDER WILL ENTER. s/ Thomas A. Varlan

UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE