

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF
ALABAMA, NORTHERN DIVISION

Willie Abner v. State of Alabama, et al.

Abner · No. 2:25-CV-875-WKW · Decided December 17, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Middle District of Alabama dismissed Willie Abner’s 42 U.S.C. § 1983 complaint arising from his pending state criminal proceedings. Claims against the State of Alabama and Judge Goggans, as well as claims concerning Investigator Davis’s judicial testimony, were dismissed with prejudice based on immunity and related pleading deficiencies; the false-arrest claim was also dismissed with prejudice. The malicious-prosecution and injunctive-relief claims were dismissed without prejudice because the prosecution had not favorably terminated and Younger abstention applied.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Middle District of Alabama, Northern Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	W. Keith Watkins
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Middle District of Alabama, Northern Division
DECIDED	December 17, 2025
DOCKET	2:25-CV-875-WKW
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	A pro se incarcerated plaintiff proceeding in forma pauperis brought a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 action challenging his arrest, preliminary hearing, prosecution, and continued state criminal proceedings. The district court screened the complaint under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) and 1915A(b) and dismissed the claims, some with prejudice and some without prejudice.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Mandatory screening under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) and 1915A(b), applying the Rule 12(b)(6) failure-to-state-a-claim standard. The court accepted well-pleaded factual allegations as true, construed them liberally because the plaintiff was pro se, and assessed whether the complaint stated a plausible claim for relief.

PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown; district court memorandum opinion and order
PARTIES	Willie Abner v. State of Alabama, Judge Goggans, Investigator Davis

TOPICS

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the State of Alabama is subject to suit and liability under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.
2. Whether Judge Goggans was entitled to absolute judicial immunity for acts performed while presiding over Abner's preliminary hearing.
3. Whether Abner stated a § 1983 false-arrest claim when he was arrested pursuant to a warrant.
4. Whether Abner stated a § 1983 malicious-prosecution claim without alleging favorable termination of the underlying criminal proceeding.
5. Whether Investigator Davis was absolutely immune from damages liability for allegedly perjured testimony during a judicial proceeding.
6. Whether the district court was required to abstain under *Younger v. Harris* from enjoining the ongoing state criminal prosecution.
7. Whether amendment of the complaint would be futile.

HOLDINGS

1. The State of Alabama is not a person subject to suit under § 1983 and is protected by Eleventh Amendment immunity because Alabama has not waived that immunity and Congress has not abrogated it for § 1983 actions.
2. Judge Goggans was absolutely immune from Abner's § 1983 claims because the challenged conduct consisted of judicial acts performed within the jurisdiction of the state district court.
3. Abner could not state a § 1983 false-arrest claim because the state court records established that he was arrested pursuant to a warrant, meaning the seizure occurred pursuant to legal process.
4. Abner failed to state a plausible § 1983 malicious-prosecution claim because he did not allege that the underlying criminal prosecution had terminated in his favor.
5. Investigator Davis was absolutely immune from damages liability under § 1983 for allegedly perjured testimony given during Abner's preliminary hearing.
6. The court was required to abstain under *Younger* from granting injunctive relief that would dismiss or interfere with Abner's ongoing state criminal proceedings.
7. Leave to amend was properly denied because amendment would be futile.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Absolute judicial immunity applies “regardless of whether [the judge] made a mistake, acted maliciously, or exceeded his authority.”” (Section IV.B)

“Section 1983 does not authorize a damages claim for alleged acts of perjury during judicial proceedings.” (Section IV.C.2)

“Younger directs federal courts to abstain from granting injunctive or declaratory relief that would interfere with or restrain ongoing state criminal proceedings except in extraordinary circumstances.” (Section IV.D)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Willie Abner, an inmate at the Chilton County Jail, challenged his arrest and ongoing state prosecution under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. He alleged that Investigator Davis gave false testimony at an August 2025 preliminary hearing, threatened him during questioning at a police station, and initiated criminal proceedings; he also alleged that Judge Goggans disregarded exculpatory evidence and restricted his participation at the hearing. State court records showed that Abner was arrested pursuant to a warrant and that the underlying criminal charge remained pending.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Abner filed the complaint on October 30, 2025, alleging due-process, Fourth Amendment, and other constitutional violations arising from his arrest and prosecution in Alabama state court. The district court conducted mandatory screening, determined that the claims against the State and judge were barred by statutory and absolute immunities, that the claims against the investigator failed or were barred by immunity, and that Younger abstention barred the requested interference with the pending state prosecution. The court denied leave to amend as futile and directed that final judgment be entered separately.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Toussaint v. U.S. Attorney's Office, 2025 WL 2237376, at *3 (11th Cir. Aug. 6, 2025) (per curiam)
- Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 327-328 (1989)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009)
- Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 557, 570 (2007)
- Bilal v. Geo Care, LLC, 981 F.3d 903, 911 (11th Cir. 2020)
- Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007)
- GJR Investments v. Escambia County, 132 F.3d 1359, 1369 (11th Cir. 1998), overruled on other grounds by Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662
- American Manufacturers Mutual Insurance Co. v. Sullivan, 526 U.S. 40, 49-50 (1999)
- Will v. Michigan Department of State Police, 491 U.S. 58, 70 (1989)

- *Pennhurst State School & Hospital v. Halderman*, 465 U.S. 89, 98, 100 (1984)
- *Seminole Tribe of Florida v. Florida*, 517 U.S. 44, 59 (1996)
- *Holmes v. Hale*, 701 F. App'x 751, 753 (11th Cir. 2017)
- *Selensky v. Alabama*, 619 F. App'x 846, 848 (11th Cir. 2015)
- *McCullough v. Finley*, 907 F.3d 1324, 1330-1331 (11th Cir. 2018)
- *Dykes v. Hosemann*, 776 F.2d 942, 945 (11th Cir. 1985) (per curiam)
- *Washington Mutual Bank v. Bush*, 220 F. App'x 974, 975 (11th Cir. 2007)
- *Thompson v. Clark*, 596 U.S. 36, 39 (2022)
- *Williams v. Aguirre*, 965 F.3d 1147, 1158 (11th Cir. 2020)
- *Giles v. Manser*, 757 F. App'x 891, 895 (11th Cir. 2018)
- *Gonzalez v. Federal National Mortgage Association*, 860 F. App'x 693, 695 n.4 (11th Cir. 2021)
- *United States ex rel. Osheroff v. Humana, Inc.*, 776 F.3d 805, 811-812 & n.4 (11th Cir. 2015)
- *Williams v. McNeil*, 557 F.3d 1287, 1290 n.2 (11th Cir. 2009)
- *Jeffries v. United States*, 748 F.3d 1310, 1314 (11th Cir. 2014)
- *Briscoe v. LaHue*, 460 U.S. 325, 335-336, 343 (1983)
- *Younger v. Harris*, 401 U.S. 37, 43-45 (1971)
- *Johnson v. Florida*, 32 F.4th 1092, 1099 (11th Cir. 2022)
- *Hale v. Pate*, 694 F. App'x 682, 684 (11th Cir. 2017)
- *Johnson v. Boyd*, 568 F. App'x 719, 723 (11th Cir. 2014)
- *Jenkins v. Walker*, 620 F. App'x 709, 711 (11th Cir. 2015)
- *Cockrell v. Sparks*, 510 F.3d 1307, 1310 (11th Cir. 2007)
- *Silberman v. Miami Dade Transit*, 927 F.3d 1123, 1133 (11th Cir. 2019)