

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Lawrence Christopher Smith v. Secretary, et al.

Smith v. Secretary · No. No. 1:23-cv-00526-KES-SAB (PC) · Decided August 27, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California struck Plaintiff Lawrence Christopher Smith’s third amended complaint because it was 48 pages, largely incoherent and illegible, and failed to comply with Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8 and the court’s 25-page limit. The court granted one final opportunity to file a compliant third amended complaint within 30 days or submit a notice of voluntary dismissal. The order warned that failure to comply would result in a recommendation that the action be dismissed.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Stanley A. Boone
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	August 27, 2025
DOCKET	No. 1:23-cv-00526-KES-SAB (PC)
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The court screened a pro se prisoner's third amended complaint in a civil-rights action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The court struck the complaint for exceeding the court's page limit and failing to comply with Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8, while granting one final opportunity to file a compliant third amended complaint.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Screening under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915A and 1915(e)(2), including whether the complaint states a facially plausible claim and complies with Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8. The court also applied its inherent authority to manage its docket and enforce pleading page limits.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district-court order; nonprecedential
PARTIES	Lawrence Christopher Smith v. Secretary, et al.

TOPICS

pleadings

civil procedure

section 1983

prisoners rights

joinder

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

civil rights

prisoner civil rights

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the court should strike Plaintiff's third amended complaint for exceeding the court's 25-page limit.
2. Whether the third amended complaint complied with Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8's requirement that allegations be short, plain, simple, concise, and direct.
3. Whether the court should allow Plaintiff one final opportunity to file a compliant third amended complaint rather than dismissing the action.
4. What pleading requirements govern the joinder of claims and defendants in Plaintiff's amended complaint.

HOLDINGS

1. The court may enforce a 25-page limit for the complaint and its exhibits, and Plaintiff's 48-page third amended complaint was properly stricken for violating that limit.
2. The third amended complaint violated Rule 8 because it was excessively long, largely incoherent and illegible, failed to present short and plain statements of claims, and did not provide Defendants adequate notice of the claims.
3. Plaintiff may not join unrelated claims against unrelated defendants in one action; multiple defendants may be joined only when the claims arise from the same transaction or occurrence and share common questions of law or fact, after which multiple claims against a properly joined defendant may be considered under Rule 18.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Rather than spend an inordinate amount of time trying to evaluate what, if any claims are stated in Plaintiff's voluminous filing, the Court will permit Plaintiff one final opportunity to file another third amended complaint.” (at 5)

“The largely illegible complaint does not set forth a basis for federal jurisdiction and fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted.” (at 6)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff, a prisoner proceeding pro se and in forma pauperis, filed a § 1983 action against governmental defendants. His third amended complaint was 48 pages long, exceeded the court's generally applicable 25-page limit, and was described as largely incoherent and illegible. The complaint did not establish a basis for federal jurisdiction, did not state a claim upon which relief could be granted, and did not provide Defendants adequate notice of the claims.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The District Judge denied Plaintiff's motion to stay on November 4, 2024, and allowed thirty days to file a third amended complaint complying with the screening order. Plaintiff filed amended complaints, including a 48-page third amended complaint on May 8, 2025. The court previously struck an amended complaint for exceeding the 25-page limit and again struck the 48-page complaint, allowing Plaintiff thirty days to file a compliant complaint or voluntarily dismiss the action.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662 (2009)
- Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544 (2007)
- Jones v. Williams, 297 F.3d 930, 934 (9th Cir.)
- Wilhelm v. Rotman, 680 F.3d 1113, 1121 (9th Cir.)
- Moss v. U.S. Secret Service, 572 F.3d 962, 969 (9th Cir.)
- Lal v. United States, 2022 WL 37019, at *2 (E.D. Cal. Jan. 3, 2022)
- Williams v. Corcoran State Prison, 2022 WL 1093976, at *1 (E.D. Cal. Apr. 12, 2022)
- Rivas v. Padilla, 2022 WL 675704, at *2 (E.D. Cal. Mar. 7, 2022)
- Skinner v. Lee, 2021 WL 6617390, at *2-*3 (C.D. Cal. May 20, 2021)
- Cafasso v. Gen. Dynamics C4 Sys., Inc., 637 F.3d 1047, 1059 (9th Cir.)
- McHenry v. Renne, 84 F.3d 1172, 1179 (9th Cir.)
- Nevijel v. North Coast Life Ins. Co., 651 F.2d 671, 673-74 (9th Cir.)
- Sparling v. Hoffman Constr. Co., 864 F.2d 635, 640 (9th Cir.)
- Knapp v. Hogan, 738 F.3d 1106, 1109 (9th Cir.)
- Doe I v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., 572 F.3d 677, 681 (9th Cir.)
- Ramirez v. Perez, 2022 WL 21827691 (E.D. Cal. 2022)
- Case v. Waddington, 2007 WL 1140282 (W.D. Wash. 2007)
- Ready Transp., Inc. v. AAR Mfg., Inc., 627 F.3d 402, 404-05 (9th Cir.)
- Wolf v. Idaho State Bd. of Correction, 2021 WL 3721434, at *2 (9th Cir. Aug. 23, 2021)
- Watts v. Thompson, 116 F.3d 220, 224 (7th Cir.)
- Lewis v. Florida Dep't of Corr., 739 F. App'x 585 (11th Cir. Sept. 28, 2018)
- Owens v. Hinsley, 635 F.3d 950, 952 (7th Cir.)
- George v. Smith, 507 F.3d 605, 607 (7th Cir.)
- Coughlin v. Rogers, 130 F.3d 1348, 1351 (9th Cir.)
- Desert Empire Bank v. Insurance Co. of North America, 623 F.3d 1371, 1375 (9th Cir.)

