

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Rogers v. Valdez

Rogers v. Valdez · No. 2:24-cv-02506-TLN-CSK · Decided April 9, 2025

SUMMARY

The Eastern District of California recommends denying Nicole Jean Rogers’s application to proceed in forma pauperis and dismissing her complaint against Moses Valdez without leave to amend. The court concludes that the complaint fails to establish federal-question or diversity jurisdiction and does not comply with Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8. The recommendation also directs that the case be closed.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Chi Soo Kim
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	April 9, 2025
DOCKET	2:24-cv-02506-TLN-CSK
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Findings and recommendations on a pro se plaintiff's application to proceed in forma pauperis and screening of the complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e).
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), the court must screen an action brought in forma pauperis and dismiss it if it is frivolous or malicious, fails to state a claim, or seeks monetary relief from an immune defendant. The court accepts well-pleaded factual allegations as true, construes them in the light most favorable to the plaintiff, liberally construes pro se pleadings, and does not accept conclusory allegations, unreasonable inferences, or unwarranted factual deductions.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown; findings and recommendations in an individual district court case.
PARTIES	Nicole Jean Rogers v. Moses Valdez

TOPICS

subject matter jurisdiction

pleadings

civil procedure

motions to dismiss

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

federal jurisdiction

pleading and screening

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Plaintiff established federal-question or diversity subject matter jurisdiction.
2. Whether the complaint stated a short and plain claim for relief as required by Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8.
3. Whether the complaint was subject to dismissal under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B).
4. Whether leave to amend should be denied as futile.
5. Whether Plaintiff's application to proceed in forma pauperis should be denied because the action was facially frivolous or without merit.

HOLDINGS

1. The complaint did not establish federal-question jurisdiction because the asserted rape and economic-abuse claims were not based on federal law, entrapment is a defense rather than an independent claim, and the federal embezzlement statute does not provide a private right of action.
2. The complaint did not establish diversity jurisdiction because it failed to allege complete diversity of citizenship, and the allegations indicated that both parties appeared to be California citizens.
3. The complaint failed to provide a short and plain statement of a claim because it did not clearly identify the claims being asserted or allege sufficient facts showing the elements of those claims.
4. Dismissal without leave to amend was recommended because the complaint was not cogent or non-frivolous, lacked subject matter jurisdiction, and its deficiencies appeared incapable of being cured by amendment.
5. The IFP application should be denied because, although Plaintiff made the required financial showing, the proposed action was facially frivolous, without merit, failed to state a claim, and lacked subject matter jurisdiction.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Subject-matter jurisdiction can never be waived or forfeited” (at 3)

“A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” (at 4)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff alleged that Defendant raped her in California in 1993 and later manipulated information relating to jewelry stores, a purported trust, and alleged criminal activity. She identified rape, entrapment, economic abuse, and embezzlement on the civil cover sheet and sought \$10 million. The complaint and civil cover sheet

identified California addresses or residence information but also checked a box indicating a foreign nation without alleging facts establishing diverse citizenship.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff filed a complaint and an application to proceed in forma pauperis. The magistrate judge concluded that Plaintiff financially qualified under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a), but recommended denying IFP status because the action was facially frivolous, failed to state a claim, and did not establish subject matter jurisdiction. The magistrate judge also recommended dismissal without leave to amend and closure of the case, subject to objections and review by the assigned district judge under 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1).

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Escobedo v. Applebees, 787 F.3d 1226, 1234 (9th Cir. 2015)
- Minetti v. Port of Seattle, 152 F.3d 1113, 1115 (9th Cir. 1998)
- Tripathi v. First National Bank & Trust, 821 F.2d 1368, 1370 (9th Cir. 1987)
- McGee v. Department of Child Support Services, 584 F. App'x 638 (9th Cir. 2014)
- Smart v. Heinze, 347 F.2d 114, 116 (9th Cir. 1965)
- Lopez v. Smith, 203 F.3d 1122, 1126-27, 1130-31 (9th Cir. 2000) (en banc)
- Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 325, 327 (1989)
- Von Saher v. Norton Simon Museum of Art at Pasadena, 592 F.3d 954, 960 (9th Cir. 2010), cert. denied, 564 U.S. 1037 (2011)
- Hebbe v. Pliler, 627 F.3d 338, 342 & n.7 (9th Cir. 2010)
- Western Mining Council v. Watt, 643 F.2d 618, 624 (9th Cir. 1981)
- Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555-57, 570 (2007)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009)
- Cahill v. Liberty Mutual Insurance Co., 80 F.3d 336, 339 (9th Cir. 1996)
- Chilkat Indian Village v. Johnson, 870 F.2d 1469, 1472 (9th Cir. 1989)
- Retanan v. California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation, 2012 WL 1833888, at *5 (E.D. Cal. May 18, 2012)
- United States v. Gomez, 6 F.4th 992, 1001 (9th Cir. 2021)
- Kokkonen v. Guardian Life Insurance Co., 511 U.S. 375, 377 (1994)
- Casey v. Lewis, 4 F.3d 1516, 1519 (9th Cir. 1993)
- Bender v. Williamsport Area School District, 475 U.S. 534, 546 (1986)
- Morongo Band of Mission Indians v. California State Board of Equalization, 858 F.2d 1376, 1380 (9th Cir. 1988)
- Gonzalez v. Thaler, 565 U.S. 134, 141 (2012)

- McHenry v. Renne, 84 F.3d 1172, 1178-80 (9th Cir. 1996)
- Rogers v. Ward-Rust, 2024 WL 4505531 (E.D. Cal. Oct. 16, 2024)
- Rogers v. Eastern Indians, 2024 WL 5220462 (E.D. Cal. Dec. 26, 2024)
- Rogers v. Federal Background Investigation - Background Check, 2024 WL 4626231 (E.D. Cal. Oct. 30, 2024)
- Cato v. United States, 70 F.3d 1103, 1105-06 (9th Cir. 1995)
- Turner v. Duncan, 158 F.3d 449, 455 (9th Cir. 1998)
- Martinez v. Yist, 951 F.2d 1153, 1156-57 (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 NICOLE JEAN ROGERS, Case No. 2:24-cv-02506-TLN-CSK 12 Plaintiff,
 13 v. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 14 MOSES VALDEZ, (ECF Nos. 1, 2) 15
 Defendant. 16 17 Plaintiff Nicole Jean Rogers is representing herself in this action and seeks leave
 18 to proceed in forma pauperis (“IFP”) pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915.1 (ECF No. 2.)

For the 19 reasons that follow, the Court recommends Plaintiff’s IFP application be denied, and the
 20 Complaint be dismissed without leave to amend. 21 I. MOTION TO PROCEED IN FORMA
 PAUPERIS 22 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a) provides that the court may authorize the commencement, 23
 prosecution or defense of any suit without prepayment of fees or security “by a person 24 who
 submits an affidavit stating the person is “unable to pay such fees or give security 25 therefor.”
 This affidavit is to include, among other things, a statement of all assets the 26 person possesses.

Id. The IFP statute does not itself define what constitutes insufficient 27 1 This matter proceeds
 before the undersigned pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636, Fed. R. 28 Civ. P. 72, and Local Rule 302(c).
 1 assets. See Escobedo v. Applebees, 787 F.3d 1226, 1234 (9th Cir. 2015).

In Escobedo, 2 the Ninth Circuit stated that an affidavit in support of an IFP application is
 sufficient 3 where it alleges that the affiant cannot pay court costs and still afford the necessities of
 4 life. Id. “One need not be absolutely destitute to obtain benefits of the in forma pauperis 5
 statute.” Id. Nonetheless, a party seeking IFP status must allege poverty “with some 6 particularity,
 definiteness and certainty.” Id. According to the United States Department 7 of Health and Human
 Services, the current poverty guideline for a household of one (not 8 residing in Alaska or Hawaii)
 is \$15,060.00.

See U.S. Dpt. Health & Human Service 9 (available at <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>). 10
 Here, Plaintiff’s IFP shows that she has a yearly income of \$17,940, and pays 11 \$900 a month in
 rent. See ECF No. 2. Plaintiff has made the required showing under 12 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a). See
 id. However, the Court will recommend Plaintiff’s IFP 13 application be denied because the action
 is facially frivolous and without merit because it 14 fails to state a claim and lacks subject matter

jurisdiction. “A district court may deny leave to proceed in forma pauperis at the outset if it appears from the face of the proposed complaint that the action is frivolous or without merit.” *Minetti v. Port of Seattle*, 152 F.3d 1113, 1115 (9th Cir. 1998) (quoting *Tripati v. First Nat. Bank & Tr.*, 821 F.2d 1368, 1370 (9th Cir. 1987)); see also *McGee v. Dep’t of Child Support Servs.*, 584 F.3d 638 (9th Cir. 2014) (“the district court did not abuse its discretion by denying McGee’s request to proceed IFP because it appears from the face of the amended complaint that McGee’s action is frivolous or without merit”); *Smart v. Heinze*, 347 F.2d 114, 116 (9th Cir. 1965) (“It is the duty of the District Court to examine any application for leave to proceed in forma pauperis to determine whether the proposed proceeding has merit and if it appears that the proceeding is without merit, the court is bound to deny a motion seeking leave to proceed in forma pauperis.”).

Because it appears from the face of the Complaint that this action is frivolous and is without merit as discussed in more detail below, the Court recommends denying Plaintiff’s IFP motion.

II. SCREENING REQUIREMENT Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e), the court must screen every in forma pauperis proceeding, and must order dismissal of the case if it is “frivolous or malicious,” “fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted,” or “seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief.” 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2) (B); *Lopez v. Smith*, 620 F.3d 1122, 1126-27 (2000) (en banc).

A claim is legally frivolous when it lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact. *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989). In reviewing a complaint under this standard, the court accepts as true the factual allegations contained in the complaint, unless they are clearly baseless or fanciful, and construes those allegations in the light most favorable to the plaintiff.

See *Neitzke*, 490 U.S. at 327; *Von Saher v. Norton Simon Museum of Art at Pasadena*, 592 F.3d 954, 960 (9th Cir. 2010), cert. denied, 564 U.S. 1037 (2011). Pleadings by self-represented litigants are liberally construed. *Hebbe v. Pliler*, 627 F.3d 338, 342 & n.7 (9th Cir. 2010) (liberal construction appropriate even post-*Iqbal*). However, the court need not accept as true conclusory allegations, unreasonable inferences, or unwarranted deductions of fact.

Western Mining Council v. Watt, 643 F.2d 618, 624 (9th Cir. 1981). A formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action does not suffice to state a claim. *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555-57 (2007); *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009). To state a claim on which relief may be granted, the plaintiff must allege enough facts “to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 570. “A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the

reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” 24 *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678.

A pro se litigant is entitled to notice of the deficiencies in the 25 complaint and an opportunity to amend unless the complaint’s deficiencies could not be 26 cured by amendment. See *Lopez*, 203 F.3d at 1130-31; *Cahill v. Liberty Mut. Ins. Co.*, 80 27 F.3d 336, 339 (9th Cir. 1996). 28 / / / 1 III. THE COMPLAINT 2 Plaintiff brings her Complaint against Defendant Moses Valdez.

See Compl. (ECF 3 No. 1). On the first page of her Complaint, Plaintiff provides a Sacramento address for 4 Defendant (Compl. at 1), and on the Civil Cover Sheet Plaintiff states that Defendant 5 resides in Stockton, California (ECF No. 1-1). But Plaintiff also checked the box for 6 “Foreign Nation” in the Citizenship of Principal Parties section. ECF No. 1-1.

Plaintiff 7 alleges that in July 1993, Defendant raped her in Oak Park, California “off of 21st street 8 and 36th Avenue.” Compl. at 1. Plaintiff alleges that in 2007, Defendant was on the run 9 from his parole agent and that there was “a grand theft robbery of Mervyns.” Compl. at 1- 10 2. Plaintiff also alleges that Defendant was in jail, and Plaintiff sent him a 11 “catalog/magazine of Rogers Jewelry, my Aunt Linda, and my Mama June Maberry.” 12 Id.at 2.

She further states the Defendant “manipulated, used, and abused the information 13 to and for his full advantage.” Id. Plaintiff alleges that Defendant and his associates 14 “have used drug and murder money for purposes to buy out the jewelry stores,” and that 15 she had a trust written in 2005 that “they manipulated” in 2011. Id. On the Civil Cover 16 Sheet, Plaintiff states that she is bringing causes of action for rape, entrapment, 17 economic abuse, and embezzlement.

ECF No. 1-1. Plaintiff requests \$10 million on the 18 Civil Cover Sheet. Id. 19 IV. DISCUSSION 20 A. Lack of Subject Matter Jurisdiction 21 Federal courts are courts of limited jurisdiction and may hear only those cases 22 authorized by federal law. *Kokkonen v. Guardian Life Ins. Co.*, 511 U.S. 375, 377 (1994). 23 Jurisdiction is a threshold inquiry, and “[f]ederal courts are presumed to lack jurisdiction, 24 ‘unless the contrary appears affirmatively from the record.’” *Casey v. Lewis*, 4 F.3d 1516, 25 1519 (9th Cir.

1993) (quoting *Bender v. Williamsport Area Sch. Dist.*, 475 U.S. 534, 546 26 (1986)); see *Morongo Band of Mission Indians v. Cal. State Bd. of Equalization*, 858 27 F.2d 1376, 1380 (9th Cir. 1988). Without jurisdiction, the district court cannot decide the 28 merits of a case or order any relief and must dismiss the case. See *Morongo*, 858 F.2d 1 at 1380. A federal court’s jurisdiction may be established in one of two ways: actions 2 arising under federal law or those between citizens of different states in which the 3 alleged damages exceed \$75,000.

28 U.S.C. §§ 1331, 1332. “Subject-matter jurisdiction 4 can never be waived or forfeited,” and “courts are obligated to consider sua sponte” 5 subject matter jurisdiction even when not raised by the parties. *Gonzalez v. Thaler*, 565 6 U.S. 134, 141 (2012). 7 The Complaint fails to establish the

Court's subject matter jurisdiction. See Compl. 8 Based on Plaintiff's Complaint and Civil Cover Sheet, Plaintiff is attempting to assert 9 claims for rape, entrapment, economic abuse, and embezzlement.

As an initial matter, 10 rape and economic abuse are not based on federal law and they do not present any 11 federal question. There is a federal embezzlement statute (18 U.S.C. § 641), however 12 there is no private right of action under this statute. See *Chilkat Indian Village v. Johnson*, 13 870 F.2d 1469, 1472 (9th Cir. 1989); *Retanan v. Cal. Dept. of Corr. & Rehab.*, 2012 WL 14 1833888, at *5 (E.D.

Cal. May 18, 2012). Entrapment is a defense that is available in 15 federal court, however it is a defense and not a claim. See *United States v. Gomez*, 6 16 F.4th 992, 1001 (9th Cir. 2021) ("The Supreme Court has 'firmly recognized the defense 17 of entrapment in the federal courts.'" (citation omitted)).

Therefore, the Complaint states 18 no basis for federal court jurisdiction. 19 The Complaint also fails to establish diversity jurisdiction. Although Plaintiff states 20 the amount in controversy is \$11 million, Plaintiff fails to establish that there is complete 21 diversity of citizenship.

On the face of the Complaint, both parties appear to be citizens 22 of California. Compl. at 1. On Plaintiff's Civil Cover Sheet, she checked the box for 23 "Foreign Nation" in the Citizenship of Principal Parties section (ECF No. 1-1), however 24 Plaintiff does not make any other allegations that Defendant is diverse from Plaintiff. 25 Because there is no diversity of citizenship established here, the Court finds that it also 26 lacks subject matter jurisdiction based on diversity jurisdiction.

27 B. Failure to Comply with Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8 28 Plaintiff's Complaint does not contain a short and plain statement of a claim as 1 required by Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8. In order to give fair notice of the claims 2 and the grounds on which they rest, a plaintiff must allege with at least some degree of 3 particularity overt acts by specific defendants which support the claims.

See *Kimes v. 4 Stone*, 84 F.3d 1121, 1129 (9th Cir. 1996). While Plaintiff lists embezzlement, 5 entrapment, and economic abuse on her Civil Cover Sheet, it is not clear from the face 6 of the Complaint that she is attempting to bring these claims, and she does not 7 sufficiently allege facts supporting these claims. While Plaintiff provides some details 8 supporting the rape allegation, they are not enough to state a claim.

And as stated 9 above, the rape allegation does not provide a basis for federal jurisdiction. Although the 10 Federal Rules adopt a flexible pleading policy, even a pro se litigant's complaint must 11 give fair notice and state the elements of a claim plainly and succinctly. *Jones v. 12 Community Redev. Agency*, 733 F.2d 646, 649 (9th Cir. 1984). 13 The Complaint is subject to dismissal.

See *McHenry v. Renne*, 84 F.3d 1172, 14 1178-80 (9th Cir. 1996) (affirming dismissal of complaint where “one cannot determine 15 from the complaint who is being sued, for what relief, and on what theory, with enough 16 detail to guide discovery”). 17 C. Leave to Amend 18 In considering whether leave to amend should be granted, the Court considers 19 that Plaintiff’s Complaint does not present a cogent, non-frivolous claim.

The Court also 20 notes that Plaintiff has filed many Complaints in the Eastern District of California, most of 21 which have been dismissed. See, e.g. *Rogers v. Ward-Rust*, 2024 WL 4505531 (E.D. 22 Cal. Oct. 16, 2024), findings and recommendations adopted by 2024 WL 4770308 (E.D. 23 Cal. Nov. 13, 2024) (dismissing plaintiff’s amended complaint without leave to amend); 24 *Rogers v. Eastern Indians*, 2024 WL 5220462 (E.D.

Cal. Dec. 26, 2024) (dismissing 25 complaint without leave to amend); *Rogers v. Fed. Background Investigation - 26 Background Check*, 2024 WL 4626231 (E.D. Cal. Oct. 30, 2024) (same). In light of the 27 Court’s lack of subject matter jurisdiction and the Complaint’s deficiencies, it appears 28 granting leave to amend would be futile.

The Complaint should therefore be dismissed 1 | without leave to amend. See *Lopez*, 203 F.3d at 1130-31; *Cato v. United States*, 70 F.3d 2 | 1103, 1105-06 (9th Cir. 1995). 3 | V. CONCLUSION 4 Based upon the findings above, it is RECOMMENDED that: 5 1. Plaintiff’s motion to proceed in forma pauperis (ECF No. 2) be DENIED; 6 2. Plaintiffs Complaint (ECF No. 1) be DISMISSED without leave to amend; 7 and 8 3.

The Clerk of the Court be directed to CLOSE this case 9 | These findings and recommendations are submitted to the United States District Judge 10 | assigned to the case, pursuant to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1). Within 14 days 11 | after being served with these findings and recommendations, any party may file written 12 | objections with the Court and serve a copy on all parties.

This document should be 13 | captioned “Objections to Magistrate Judge’s Findings and Recommendations.” Any reply 14 || to the objections shall be served on all parties and filed with the Court within 14 days 15 | after service of the objections. Failure to file objections within the specified time may 16 || waive the right to appeal the District Court’s order.

Turner v. Duncan, 158 F.3d 449, 455 17 | (9th Cir. 1998); *Martinez v. Yist*, 951 F.2d 1153, 1156-57 (9th Cir. 1991). 18 19 | Dated: April 8, 2025 Cc (i s ☐☐ 20 CHI SOO KIM UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE 22 || 5, roge.2506.24 23 24 25 26 27 28