

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
INDIANA, FORT WAYNE DIVISION

Allen Cooley, Sr. v. Zachary L. Cole and Kyra D. Woods

Cooley · No. 1:25-CV-602-TLS-AZ · Decided December 16, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana held that Allen Cooley, Sr.’s amended prisoner complaint did not state plausible Fourth Amendment claims for excessive force or delayed medical treatment. The court granted Cooley until January 20, 2026, to file a second amended complaint and cautioned that failure to respond would result in dismissal under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana, Fort Wayne Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Theresa L. Springmann
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana, Fort Wayne Division
DECIDED	December 16, 2025
DOCKET	1:25-CV-602-TLS-AZ
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The court screened a pro se prisoner's amended complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A and determined that it failed to state a claim for relief. Rather than dismissing immediately, the court granted the plaintiff leave to file a second amended complaint.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, the court reviews the merits of a prisoner complaint and dismisses it if it is frivolous or malicious, fails to state a claim, or seeks monetary relief from an immune defendant. For failure to state a claim, the complaint must contain sufficient factual matter to state a plausible claim for relief.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court opinion
PARTIES	Allen Cooley, Sr. v. Zachary L. Cole, Kyra D. Woods

TOPICS

prisoners rights

section 1983

police misconduct

civil rights

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights

prisoner civil rights

constitutional law

federal civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the amended complaint plausibly alleged that the officers used objectively unreasonable force in violation of the Fourth Amendment.
2. Whether the amended complaint plausibly alleged that the officers objectively unreasonably denied or delayed medical care during the period after arrest and before a probable-cause hearing.
3. Whether the court should dismiss the amended complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A or permit another amendment.

HOLDINGS

1. The amended complaint failed to state a plausible Fourth Amendment excessive-force claim because it did not provide facts showing that the officers' actions were objectively unreasonable in the circumstances.
2. Because the alleged events occurred during the period after arrest and before a probable-cause hearing, the denial-of-medical-care claim arose under the Fourth Amendment and was subject to an objective-reasonableness inquiry; the amended complaint failed to state that claim.
3. A complaint must contain sufficient factual matter to state a claim for relief that is plausible on its face; allegations that support only a mere possibility of misconduct are insufficient.
4. The court granted Cooley leave to file a second amended complaint because the defects might be correctable and amendment was not shown to be futile at this stage.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The question in Fourth Amendment excessive use of force cases “is whether the officers’ actions are ‘objectively reasonable’ in light of the facts and circumstances confronting them, without regard to their underlying intent or motivation.”” (Opinion and Order)

“A complaint must contain sufficient factual matter “to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.”” (Opinion and Order)

“This complaint does not state a claim for which relief can be granted.” (Opinion and Order)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Cooley alleged that Fort Wayne police officers roughly grabbed his left hand, applied substantial pressure, and broke it on April 10, 2025. He also alleged that the officers delayed taking him for medical treatment. The complaint did not explain the circumstances of the hand restraint, what the officers knew about his medical

needs, what treatment he requested, why immediate treatment was necessary, what the officers were doing instead of taking him to a hospital, or what injury resulted from the delay.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Allen Cooley filed an amended complaint alleging that two Fort Wayne police officers broke his hand and delayed his medical treatment. On screening under § 1915A, the court found that the complaint lacked sufficient facts to plausibly allege objectively unreasonable force or denial of medical care. The court granted leave to amend by January 20, 2026, and cautioned that failure to respond would result in dismissal without further notice.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007)
- Graham v. Connor, 490 U.S. 386, 397 (1989)
- Braun v. Village of Palatine, 56 F.4th 542, 551 (7th Cir. 2022)
- Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555, 556, 570 (2007)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678-79 (2009)
- Swanson v. Citibank, N.A., 614 F.3d 400, 403 (7th Cir. 2010)
- Abu-Shawish v. United States, 898 F.3d 726, 738 (7th Cir. 2018)

OPINION

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT NORTHERN DISTRICT OF INDIANA FORT WAYNE DIVISION ALLEN COOLEY, SR., Plaintiff, v. CAUSE NO.: 1:25-CV-602-TLS-AZ ZACHARY L. COLE and KYRA D. WOODS, Defendants. OPINION AND ORDER Allen Cooley, Sr., a prisoner without a lawyer, filed an amended complaint alleging two Fort Wayne Police Officers broke his hand. ECF 7. “A document filed pro se is to be liberally construed, and a pro se complaint, however inartfully pleaded, must be held to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers.” Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007) (cleaned up).

Nevertheless, under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, the court must review the merits of a prisoner complaint and dismiss it if the action is frivolous or malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief. Cooley alleges the police officers roughly grabbed his left hand, applied a lot of pressure, and broke it on April 10, 2025.

The question in Fourth Amendment excessive use of force cases “is whether the officers’ actions are ‘objectively reasonable’ in light of the facts and circumstances confronting them, without

regard to their underlying intent or motivation.” *Graham v. Connor*, 490 U.S. 386, 397 (1989). This complaint provides no information about what was happening when they grabbed his hand.

There are many legitimate reasons why a police officer would apply pressure to someone’s hand. Without more facts about what happened, it is mere speculation to infer that the officers’ actions were objectively unreasonable. Cooley alleges the police officers delayed taking him for medical treatment.

Because these events took place while [he] was under arrest and prior to a probable-cause hearing, the § 1983 claim for denial of medical care arises under the Fourth Amendment. Accordingly, we ask whether the officer’s conduct was objectively unreasonable under the circumstances.

The inquiry considers: (1) whether the officer had notice of the detainee’s medical needs; (2) the seriousness of the medical need; (3) the scope of the requested treatment; and (4) police interests, including administrative, penological, or investigative concerns. *Braun v. Village of Palatine*, 56 F.4th 542, 551 (7th Cir. 2022) (cleaned up).

Here, the amended complaint does not explain what the defendants knew about Cooley’s hand, why the injury needed immediate medical attention, what Cooley asked them to do for his hand, what the police were doing rather than taking him to the hospital, or what injury he suffered because of the delay. A complaint must contain sufficient factual matter “to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007). “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.” *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (citing *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 556). “Factual allegations must be enough to raise a right to relief above the speculative level, on the assumption that all the allegations in the complaint are true (even if doubtful in fact).” *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555 (cleaned up). “[W]here the well-pleaded facts do not permit the court to infer more than the mere possibility of misconduct, the complaint has alleged—but it has not shown—that the pleader is entitled to relief.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 679 (cleaned up).

Thus, “a plaintiff must do better than putting a few words on paper that, in the hands of an imaginative reader, might suggest that something has happened to her that might be redressed by the law.” *Swanson v. Citibank, N.A.*, 614 F.3d 400, 403 (7th Cir. 2010). This complaint does not state a claim for which relief can be granted. If Cooley believes he can state a claim based on (and consistent with) the events described in this complaint, he may file an amended complaint because “[t]he usual standard in civil cases is to allow defective pleadings to be corrected, especially in early stages, at least where amendment would not be futile.” *Abu-Shawish v. United States*, 898 F.3d 726, 738 (7th Cir.

2018). To file an amended complaint, he needs to write this cause number on a Pro Se 14 (INND Rev. 2/20) Prisoner Complaint form which is available from his law library. He needs to write the words "Second Amended" on the first page above the title "Prisoner Complaint" and send it to the court after he properly completes the form.

For these reasons, the court: (1) GRANTS Allen Cooley, Sr., until January 20, 2026, to file a second amended complaint; and (2) CAUTIONS Allen Cooley, Sr., if he does not respond by the deadline, this case will be dismissed under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A without further notice because the amended complaint does not state a claim for which relief can be granted. SO ORDERED on December 16, 2025. s/ Theresa L. Springmann JUDGE THERESA L. SPRINGMANN UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT