

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Edward Clayton Whittaker v. Christine Carringer, et al.

Whittaker v. Carringer · No. 2:25-cv-1862-TLN-JDP (PS) · Decided December 19, 2025

SUMMARY

A magistrate judge recommends dismissing Edward Clayton Whittaker’s amended civil rights complaint against three state court judges and a mediator. The recommendation concludes that the allegations are insufficiently particular and that the defendants are protected by judicial or quasi-judicial immunity, making further amendment futile.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Jeremy D. Peterson
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	December 19, 2025
DOCKET	2:25-cv-1862-TLN-JDP (PS)
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Findings and recommendations on screening of a pro se plaintiff's first amended complaint filed in forma pauperis.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e), the court screens an in forma pauperis complaint and must dismiss claims that are frivolous, malicious, fail to state a claim, or seek monetary relief from an immune defendant. A complaint must satisfy Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8(a)(2) and allege sufficient facts to state a plausible claim for relief.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential

TOPICS

- motions to dismiss
- pleadings
- civil rights
- government liability
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

- civil procedure
- civil rights
- constitutional law

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the first amended complaint stated a plausible claim for relief under the screening and pleading standards applicable to an in forma pauperis action.
2. Whether the defendant judges and mediator were immune from liability for damages based on their judicial or quasi-judicial acts.
3. Whether plaintiff should be granted further leave to amend.

HOLDINGS

1. The first amended complaint failed to state a claim because its limited allegations did not give defendants adequate notice of the claims or their factual basis.
2. The defendant judges were absolutely immune from civil damages liability for judicial acts, and the mediator was entitled to quasi-judicial immunity for acts within the scope of the mediator's authority.
3. Further leave to amend should be denied because amendment would be futile in light of the repeated deficiency in the amended complaint and the apparent immunity of the defendants.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“*[J]udges are absolutely immune from civil liability for damages for their judicial acts,*”” (Analysis, lines 27-32)

“Plaintiff’s amended complaint, ECF No. 8, be DISMISSED without leave to amend.” (Recommendations, lines 14-16)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff challenged orders issued in a state-court proceeding, alleging that defendants continued making judgments despite allegedly lacking jurisdiction and denied his request to move the case to another county. The defendants were three state-court judges—Christine Carringer, Christine Donovan, and Stephaine Grogan-Jones—and mediator Darlene Woodcock. The court found that the amended complaint did not identify a specific claim or provide sufficient factual detail and appeared to seek damages for judicial or quasi-judicial conduct.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff filed an action against three state-court judges and a mediator, followed by an amended complaint. The magistrate judge concluded that the amended complaint failed to state a claim, repeated the deficiencies of the original complaint, and recommended dismissal without leave to amend and closure of the case. The findings and recommendations were submitted to the assigned district judge under 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1), subject to objections within fourteen days.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678-79 (2009)
- Kobold v. Good Samaritan Reg'l Med. Ctr., 832 F.3d 1024, 1038 (9th Cir. 2016)
- Nagrampa v. MailCoups, Inc., 469 F.3d 1257, 1264 n.2 (9th Cir. 2006) (en banc)
- Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972) (per curiam)
- Hayes v. Idaho Corr. Ctr., 849 F.3d 1204, 1208 (9th Cir. 2017)
- Bruns v. Nat'l Credit Union Admin., 122 F.3d 1251, 1257 (9th Cir. 1997)
- Ivey v. Bd. of Regents, 673 F.2d 266, 268 (9th Cir. 1982)
- Jones v. Cnty. Redev. Agency, 733 F.2d 646, 649 (9th Cir. 1984)
- Mullis v. U.S. Bankr. Ct. for Dist. of Nev., 828 F.2d 1385, 1388 (9th Cir. 1987)
- Sacks v. Dietrich, 663 F.3d 1065 (9th Cir. 2011)
- Schucker v. Rockwood, 846 F.2d 1202, 1203-04 (9th Cir. 1988) (per curiam)
- California Architectural Bldg. Prod. v. Franciscan Ceramics, 818 F.2d 1466, 1472 (9th Cir. 1987)
- Turner v. Duncan, 158 F.3d 449, 455 (9th Cir. 1998)
- Martinez v. Ylst, 951 F.2d 1153 (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 EDWARD CLAYTON WHITTAKER, Case No. 2:25-cv-1862-TLN-JDP
 (PS) 12 Plaintiff, 13 v. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 14 CHRISTINE CARRINGER,
 et al., 15 Defendant. 16 17 18 Plaintiff brings this action against three state court judges—
 defendants Christine 19 Carringer, Christine Donovan, Stephaine Grogan-Jones—and a mediator,
 defendant Darlene 20 Woodcock.

Like his earlier complaint, plaintiff's first amended complaint fails to state a claim. I 21
 recommend that the amended complaint be dismissed without leave to amend. 22 Screening and
 Pleading Requirements 23 A federal court must screen the complaint of any claimant seeking
 permission to proceed 24 in forma pauperis. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e).

The court must identify any cognizable claims and 25 dismiss any portion of the complaint that is
 frivolous or malicious, fails to state a claim upon 26 which relief may be granted, or seeks
 monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such 27 relief. Id. 28 1 A complaint must
 contain a short and plain statement that plaintiff is entitled to relief, 2 Fed.

R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2), and provide “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its 3
 face,” Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007). The plausibility standard does not 4
 require detailed allegations, but legal conclusions do not suffice. See Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 5
 662, 678 (2009). If the allegations “do not permit the court to infer more than the mere 6
 possibility of misconduct,” the complaint states no claim.

Id. at 679. The complaint need not 7 identify “a precise legal theory.” *Kobold v. Good Samaritan Reg’l Med. Ctr.*, 832 F.3d 1024, 8 1038 (9th Cir. 2016). Instead, what plaintiff must state is a “claim”—a set of “allegations that 9 give rise to an enforceable right to relief.” *Nagrampa v. MailCoups, Inc.*, 469 F.3d 1257, 1264 10 n.2 (9th Cir. 2006) (en banc) (citations omitted).

11 The court must construe a pro se litigant’s complaint liberally. See *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 12 U.S. 519, 520 (1972) (per curiam). The court may dismiss a pro se litigant’s complaint “if it 13 appears beyond doubt that the plaintiff can prove no set of facts in support of his claim which 14 would entitle him to relief.” *Hayes v. Idaho Corr. Ctr.*, 849 F.3d 1204, 1208 (9th Cir.

2017). 15 However, ““a liberal interpretation of a civil rights complaint may not supply essential elements 16 of the claim that were not initially pled.”” *Bruns v. Nat’l Credit Union Admin.*, 122 F.3d 1251, 17 1257 (9th Cir. 1997) (quoting *Ivey v. Bd. of Regents*, 673 F.2d 266, 268 (9th Cir. 1982)). 18 Analysis 19 The amended complaint’s limited allegations indicate that plaintiff seeks to challenge 20 orders issued in a state court proceeding.

Plaintiff alleges that the defendants “continued to make 21 judgments in [the] case although they had no jurisdiction.” ECF No. 8 at 4. He also appears to 22 allege that defendants denied his request to move the case to a different county. Id. at 8. 23 These limited allegations are insufficient to put defendants and on notice of plaintiff’s 24 claims and the factual basis for such claims.

See *Jones v. Cnty. Redev. Agency*, 733 F.2d 646, 649 25 (9th Cir. 1984) (“The plaintiff must allege with at least some degree of particularity overt acts 26 which defendants engaged in that support the plaintiff’s claim.”).

Although plaintiff does not 27 identify the specific claim he is attempt to allege, it is apparent that he seeks to hold defendants 28 liable for actions they took in their judicial or quasi-judicial capacities. “[J]udges are absolutely 1 immune from civil liability for damages for their judicial acts,” *Mullis v. U.S. Bankr. Crt.*

For 2 Dist. of Nevada, 828 F.2d 1385, 1388 (9th Cir. 1987), while mediators enjoy the quasi-judicial 3 immunity while acting within the scope of their authority, see *Sacks v. Dietrich*, 663 F.3d 1065 4 (9th Cir. 2011).

Accordingly, defendants are immune from liability for any claim for damages. 5 Plaintiff’s amended complaint contains the same deficiency as his original complaint, see 6 ECF Nos. 1 & 3, and I therefore find that granting further opportunities to amend would be futile. 7 See *Schucker v. Rockwood*, 846 F.2d 1202, 1203-04 (9th Cir. 1988) (per curiam) (“Dismissal of a 8 pro se complaint without leave to amend is proper only if it is absolutely clear that the 9 deficiencies of the complaint could not be cured by amendment.”) (internal quotation marks and 10 citations omitted); *California Architectural Bldg.*

Prod. v. Franciscan Ceramics, 818 F.2d 1466, 11 1472 (9th Cir. 1988) (“Valid reasons for denying leave to amend include undue delay, bad faith, 12 prejudice, and futility.”). Accordingly, I recommend the amended complaint be dismissed 13 without leave to amend. 14 Accordingly, it is hereby RECOMMENDED that: 15 1. Plaintiff’s amended complaint, ECF No. 8, be DISMISSED without leave to amend.

16 2. The Clerk of Court be directed to close the case. 17 These findings and recommendations are submitted to the United States District Judge 18 assigned to the case, pursuant to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1). Within fourteen days of 19 service of these findings and recommendations, any party may file written objections with the 20 court and serve a copy on all parties.

Any such document should be captioned “Objections to 21 Magistrate Judge’s Findings and Recommendations,” and any response shall be served and filed 22 within fourteen days of service of the objections. The parties are advised that failure to file 23 objections within the specified time may waive the right to appeal the District Court’s order. See 24 Turner v. Duncan, 158 F.3d 449, 455 (9th Cir.

1998); Martinez v. Ylst, 951 F.2d 1153 (9th Cir. 25 1991). 26 27 28 1 > IT IS SO ORDERED.
Dated: _ December 19, 2025 Q_—_. 4 JEREMY D. PETERSON 5 UNITED STATES
MAGISTRATE JUDGE 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28