

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Benjamin Karl Ray Bunton v. Keith Smith, et al.

Bunton · No. 1:23-cv-00211-JLT-SAB · Decided November 4, 2025

SUMMARY

The document contains findings and recommendations by a United States magistrate judge recommending dismissal with prejudice of Benjamin Karl Ray Bunton’s civil rights action for failure to prosecute and failure to comply with court orders. The court also vacated the scheduled November 12, 2025 hearing and advised that objections were due within fourteen days.

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	November 4, 2025
DOCKET	1:23-cv-00211-JLT-SAB
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendants moved under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(b) to dismiss the pro se plaintiff's civil-rights action with prejudice for failure to prosecute and failure to comply with court orders. A magistrate judge issued findings and recommendations recommending dismissal and vacated the scheduled hearing.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Dismissal for failure to prosecute or failure to obey a court order is evaluated under the five-factor test addressing the public interest in expeditious resolution, the court's need to manage its docket, the risk of prejudice to defendants, the public policy favoring decisions on the merits, and the availability of less drastic sanctions. The factors guide the court's exercise of discretion and are not mandatory conditions that must all be satisfied.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential
PARTIES	Keith Smith, et al.

TOPICS

motions to dismiss

sanctions

civil procedure

civil rights

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

civil rights

prisoner civil rights

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the action should be dismissed with prejudice under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(b) for failure to prosecute.
2. Whether Plaintiff's repeated failure to comply with court orders justified dismissal after consideration of the Ninth Circuit's five dismissal factors.
3. Whether the court had adequately considered lesser sanctions before recommending dismissal.

HOLDINGS

1. Dismissal with prejudice under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(b) was warranted because Plaintiff failed to prosecute the action, failed to comply with multiple court orders, failed to participate in discovery, and failed to respond to the motion to dismiss and final order to show cause.
2. The warning that failure to comply with the final order to show cause would result in a recommendation of dismissal with prejudice satisfied the requirement that the court consider less drastic sanctions.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“In determining whether to dismiss an action for lack of prosecution, the district court is required to consider several factors: ‘(1) the public’s interest in expeditious resolution of litigation; (2) the court’s need to manage its docket; (3) the risk of prejudice to the defendants; (4) the public policy favoring disposition of cases on their merits; and (5) the availability of less drastic sanctions.’” (at 3)

“Thus, Plaintiff had adequate warning that dismissal of this action would result from noncompliance with the Court’s order.” (at 5)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff, proceeding pro se and in forma pauperis, filed a civil-rights action and was subject to a discovery schedule. Although the discovery deadline was extended to August 30, 2025, Plaintiff did not make arrangements to complete his deposition or those of his witnesses, did not provide witness contact information, and failed to respond to two orders to show cause. Plaintiff also did not oppose Defendants' motion to dismiss or the final order to show cause, despite being warned that continued noncompliance could result in dismissal with prejudice.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff filed the civil-rights action on February 13, 2023. After discovery deadlines were extended, Plaintiff failed to arrange or complete his deposition and the depositions of his witnesses, failed to respond to an order to show cause, and failed to oppose Defendants' motion to dismiss. The magistrate judge issued a final order to

show cause, which Plaintiff also ignored, and recommended dismissal with prejudice under Rule 41(b), subject to review by the assigned district judge after the objection period.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Bautista v. Los Angeles Cty., 216 F.3d 837, 841 (9th Cir. 2000)
- Ready Transp., Inc. v. AAR Mfg., Inc., 627 F.3d 402, 404 (9th Cir. 2010)
- Ghazali v. Moran, 46 F.3d 52, 53-54 (9th Cir. 1995)
- Ferdik v. Bonzelet, 963 F.2d 1258, 1260-61 (9th Cir. 1992)
- Carey v. King, 856 F.2d 1439, 1440-41 (9th Cir. 1988)
- Malone v. United States Postal Serv., 833 F.2d 128, 130-33 (9th Cir. 1987)
- Henderson v. Duncan, 779 F.2d 1421, 1423-24 (9th Cir. 1986)
- In re Phenylpropanolamine (PPA) Prods. Liab. Litig., 460 F.3d 1217, 1226 (9th Cir. 2006)
- Yourish v. California Amplifier, 191 F.3d 983, 990 (9th Cir. 1999)
- Hernandez v. City of El Monte, 138 F.3d 393, 399 (9th Cir. 1998)
- Pagtalunan v. Galaza, 291 F.3d 639, 642 (9th Cir. 2002)
- In re Eisen, 31 F.3d 1447, 1452-53 (9th Cir. 1994)
- Wilkerson v. Wheeler, 772 F.3d 834, 839 (9th Cir. 2014)
- Baxter v. Sullivan, 923 F.2d 1391, 1394 (9th Cir. 1991)

OPINION

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT 9 EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA 10 11 BENJAMIN KARL RAY BUNTON, Case No. 1:23-cv-00211-JLT-SAB 12
Plaintiff, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS RECOMMENDING GRANTING 13 v.
DEFENDANT’S MOTION TO DISMISS 14 KEITH SMITH, et al., ORDER VACATING
NOVEMBER 12, 2025 HEARING 15 Defendants. (ECF No. 67) 16 OBJECTIONS DUE
WITHIN FOURTEEN 17 DAYS 18 19 I. 20 INTRODUCTION 21 Currently before the Court is
Defendants’ motion to dismiss this action for lack of 22 prosecution and for failure to comply with
the Court’s orders, brought pursuant to Federal Rule 23 of Civil Procedure 41(b).

The matter was referred to the undersigned pursuant to 28 U.S.C. 24 § 636(b)(1)(B). This Court, having reviewed the moving papers, the lack of an opposition brief, 25 and the Court’s record, finds the matter suitable for decision without further briefing or oral 26 argument. See Local Rule 230(c), (g).

Accordingly, the hearing set for November 12, 2025, shall be vacated. For the reasons explained herein, the Court recommends Defendant's motion to dismiss for lack of prosecution be granted and this matter be dismissed with prejudice. 1 II. 2 RELEVANT BACKGROUND 3 Benjamin Karl Ray Bunton ("Plaintiff"), who is proceeding pro se and in forma pauperis, 4 filed this civil rights action on February 13, 2023.

(ECF No. 1.) A scheduling order was issued 5 setting the discovery deadline for May 30, 2025. (ECF No. 54.) 6 On May 19, 2025, Defendants filed a motion to continue discovery and dispositive 7 motion deadlines in the scheduling order due to the parties' inability to complete Plaintiff's 8 deposition or the depositions of Plaintiff's witnesses before the deadline.

(ECF No. 59.) The 9 Court granted the motion on May 20, 2025 and extended the discovery deadline to August 30, 10 2025. (ECF No. 60.) 11 On September 5, 2025, the Court issued an order to show cause directing Plaintiff to 12 show cause in writing whether he intended to continue prosecuting this action after failing to 13 make arrangements to continue his deposition or those of his witnesses.

(ECF No. 62.) Plaintiff 14 did not respond or otherwise file anything on the docket. (ECF No. 63.) 15 On September 29, 2025, Defendants moved to dismiss the case pursuant to Federal Rule 16 of Civil Procedure 41 for failure to prosecute and failure to comply with the Court's September 17 5, 2025 order to show cause. (ECF No. 64.) Defendants argue that Plaintiff has failed to 18 cooperate in completing his deposition and has not provided contact information for his 19 witnesses since the Court's May 20, 2025 order.

(Scott Declar., ¶¶ 3, 5.) Plaintiff did not file an 20 opposition or any other response. 21 In an abundance of caution, the Court issued a final order to show cause on October 15, 22 2025, offering Plaintiff one final opportunity to oppose the motion to dismiss on or before 23 October 30, 2025. (ECF No. 67.)

As of the date of this order, Plaintiff failed to respond to the 24 Court's most recent order. 25 III. 26 LEGAL STANDARD 27 Local Rule 110 provides that "[f]ailure of counsel or of a party to comply with these 1 sanctions... within the inherent power of the Court." The Court has the inherent power to 2 control its docket and may, in the exercise of that power, impose sanctions where appropriate, 3 including dismissal of the action.

Bautista v. Los Angeles Cty., 216 F.3d 837, 841 (9th Cir. 4 2000); Ready Transp., Inc. v. AAR Mfg., Inc., 627 F.3d 402, 404 (9th Cir. 2010). 5 Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(b) provides that "[i]f the plaintiff fails to prosecute or 6 to comply with these rules or a court order, a defendant may move to dismiss the action or any 7 claim against it." "Unless the dismissal order states otherwise, a dismissal under this subdivision 8 (b) and any dismissal not under this rule—

except one for lack of jurisdiction, improper venue, or 9 failure to join a party under Rule 19— operates as an adjudication on the merits.” Fed.

R. Civ. P. 10 41(b). 11 A court may dismiss an action based on a party’s failure to prosecute an action, failure to 12 obey a court order, or failure to comply with local rules. See, e.g. *Ghazali v. Moran*, 46 F.3d 52, 13 53-54 (9th Cir. 1995) (dismissal for noncompliance with local rule); *Ferdik v. Bonzelet*, 963 F.2d 14 1258, 1260-61 (9th Cir. 1992) (dismissal for failure to comply with an order to file an amended 15 complaint); *Carey v. King*, 856 F.2d 1439, 1440-41 (9th Cir.

1988) (dismissal for failure to 16 comply with local rule requiring pro se plaintiffs to keep court apprised of address); *Malone v. 17 United States Postal Serv.*, 833 F.2d 128, 130 (9th Cir. 1987) (dismissal for failure to comply 18 with court order); *Henderson v. Duncan*, 779 F.2d 1421, 1424 (9th Cir. 1986) (dismissal for lack 19 of prosecution and failure to comply with local rules).

20 “In determining whether to dismiss an action for lack of prosecution, the district court is 21 required to consider several factors: ‘(1) the public’s interest in expeditious resolution of 22 litigation; (2) the court’s need to manage its docket; (3) the risk of prejudice to the defendants; 23 (4) the public policy favoring disposition of cases on their merits; and (5) the availability of less 24 drastic sanctions.’ ” *Carey*, 856 F.2d at 1440 (quoting *Henderson*, 779 F.2d at 1423).

These 25 factors guide a court in deciding what to do and are not conditions that must be met in order for a 26 court to take action. In *re Phenylpropanolamine (PPA) Prods. Liab. Litig.*, 460 F.3d 1217, 1226 27 (9th Cir. 2006). 1 IV. 2 DISCUSSION 3 The Ninth Circuit has stated that it “may affirm a dismissal where at least four factors 4 support dismissal... or where at least three factors ‘strongly’ support dismissal.” *Yourish v. 5 California Amplifier*, 191 F.3d 983, 990 (9th Cir.

1999) (quoting *Hernandez v. City of El 6 Monte*, 138 F.3d 393, 399 (9th Cir.1998)). 7 1. Public Interest in Expeditious Resolution of Litigation and the Court’s Need to Manage its Docket 8 The public’s interest in expeditious resolution of the litigation and the Court’s need to 9 manage its docket weigh in favor of dismissal.

In *re Phenylpropanolamine (PPA) Products 10 Liability Litigation*, 460 F.3d at 1226. “The public’s interest in expeditious resolution of 11 litigation always weighs in favor of dismissal.” *Pagtalunan v. Galaza*, 291 F.3d 639, 642 (9th 12 Cir. 2002) (quoting *Yourish*, 191 F.3d at 990.) Given that Plaintiff has failed to comply with two 13 Court orders (ECF Nos. 62, 67) and has failed to respond to Defendants’ motion to dismiss (ECF 14 No. 64), this factor weighs in favor of dismissal.

15 Furthermore, the Eastern District of California is one of the busiest Courts in the nation 16 and its dockets are extremely impacted. “It is incumbent upon the Court to manage its docket 17 without being subject to routine noncompliance of litigants.” *Pagtalunan*, 291 F.3d at 642.

The 18 Court's time spent litigating this action could have been devoted to other cases on the docket in 19 which the parties are actively litigating their action. Plaintiff's failure to comply with the orders 20 of the Court hinders the Court's ability to move this action towards disposition and indicates that 21 Plaintiff does not intend to diligently litigate this action.

The Court's need to manage its docket 22 weighs in favor of dismissal. 23 2. Prejudice to the Defendant 24 Since it appears that Plaintiff does not intend to litigate this action diligently, a rebuttable 25 presumption of prejudice to Defendants arises.

In re Eisen, 31 F.3d 1447, 1452-53 (9th Cir. 26 1994). This risk of prejudice may be rebutted if Plaintiff offers an excuse for the delay. Id. at 27 1453. However, since Plaintiff has not objected to the motion to dismiss, he has not rebutted the 1 presumption of prejudice. "To prove prejudice, a defendant must establish that plaintiff's actions 2 impaired defendant's ability to proceed to trial or threatened to interfere with the rightful 3 decision of the case." Malone, 833 F.2d at 131.

Defendants argue Plaintiff has failed to 4 cooperate in completing his deposition and has not provided contact information for his 5 witnesses since the Court's May 20, 2025 order. (Scott Declar., ¶¶ 3, 5.) The amount of delay in 6 this case is not limited but is significant.¹ The Court finds that the prejudice to Defendant based 7 on Plaintiff's failure to participate in this action threatens to interfere with the rightful decision in 8 the case and therefore weighs in favor of dismissal.

9 3. Public Policy in Favor of Deciding Cases on the Merits 10 The public policy in favor of deciding cases on their merits is outweighed by the factors 11 in favor of dismissal. It is Plaintiff's responsibility to move this action forward. This action can 12 proceed no further without Plaintiff's cooperation and compliance with the orders at issue, and 13 the action cannot simply remain idle on the Court's docket, unprosecuted.

The Court finds this 14 factor does not outweigh Plaintiff's failure to comply with the Court's orders. 15 4. Availability of Lesser Sanctions 16 Finally, a court's warning to a party that their failure to obey the court's order will result 17 in dismissal satisfies the "consideration of alternatives" requirement. Malone, 833 at 132-33. 18 The Court's October 15, 2025 order expressly stated: "[F]ailure to respond to this order to 19 show cause will result in the issuance of findings and recommendations recommending that 20 the assigned District Judge dismiss this case with prejudice." (ECF No. 67) (emphasis in 21 original).

Thus, Plaintiff had adequate warning that dismissal of this action would result from 22 noncompliance with the Court's order. 23 / / / 24 / / / 25 1 Since the Court's May 20, 2025 order, Plaintiff has left four telephone messages for Defendants' counsel requesting a return call. (Scott Declar., ¶ 5.)

In two of those messages, Plaintiff stated that he would not provide the 26 contact information for his witnesses and asserted that Defendants “owe him documents.” (Id.) Despite these messages, Defendants have been unable to reach Plaintiff. (Id. at ¶ 6.) When counsel for Defendants returns 27 Plaintiff’s calls using the number provided, the call is directed immediately to voicemail, which states that the subscriber has not set up a voicemail box.

(Id.) Plaintiff has not otherwise communicated with Defendants’ counsel 1 V. 2
RECOMMENDATION AND ORDER VACATING 3 Plaintiff has failed to comply with the Court’s orders and has failed to diligently 4 | prosecute this action.

In considering the factors to determine if this action should be dismissed, 5 | the Court finds that the factors weigh in favor of dismissal of this action, and that this action 6 | should be dismissed with prejudice for Plaintiff’s failure to obey the Court’s orders, and failure 7 | to prosecute this action. Plaintiff has not filed an opposition to Defendants’ motion to dismiss.

8 Accordingly, it is HEREBY RECOMMENDED that this action be DISMISSED with 9 | prejudice, for Plaintiffs failure to abide by the Court’s order and failure to prosecute. 10 These findings and recommendations are submitted to the District Judge assigned to this 11 | action, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(B) and this Court’s Local Rule 304. Within fourteen 12 | (14) days of service of this recommendation, Plaintiff may file written objections to these 13 | findings and recommendations with the Court.

Such a document should be captioned 14 | “Objections to Magistrate Judge’s Findings and Recommendations.” The District Judge will 15 | review the undersigned’s findings and recommendations pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C). 16 | Plaintiff is advised that failure to file objections within the specified time may result in the 17 | waiver of rights on appeal.

Wilkerson v. Wheeler, 772 F.3d 834, 839 (9th Cir. 2014) (citing 18 | Baxter v. Sullivan, 923 F.2d 1391, 1394 (9th Cir. 1991)). 19 IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the hearing set for November 12, 2025, IS HEREBY 20 | VACATED. 21 IT IS SO ORDERED. F- 2 Se 23 | Dated: _November 4, 2025 _ eS STANLEY A. BOONE 24 United States Magistrate Judge 25 26 27 28