

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

In re CIM-SQ Transfer Cases

No. 5:20-cv-06326-EJD (N.D. Cal. May 8, 2025) · No. 5:20-cv-06326-EJD · Decided May 8, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of California screens a pro se civil rights complaint concerning the transfer of prisoners from California Institution for Men to San Quentin State Prison during the COVID-19 pandemic. The court dismisses Clark Kelso and R. Steven Tharratt as defendants, while finding a plausible Eighth Amendment deliberate-indifference claim against the remaining defendants in their individual capacities. The court orders service through the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation e-service program and keeps the case stayed for purposes other than service.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Edward J. Davila
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
DECIDED	May 8, 2025
DOCKET	5:20-cv-06326-EJD
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Pro se former prisoner brought a civil-rights action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 concerning COVID-19-related prisoner transfers. The district court screened the complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), dismissed two defendants, found a cognizable Eighth Amendment claim against the remaining defendants, ordered service, and stayed the case for all purposes other than service.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court screened the in forma pauperis complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), dismissing claims that are frivolous or malicious, fail to state a claim, or seek monetary relief from an immune defendant. Pro se pleadings were liberally construed, and the complaint was evaluated under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8(a)(2) and the plausibility standard.

PRECEDENTIAL VALUE

Unpublished federal district court order; precedential status is unknown in the provided metadata.

TOPICS

prisoners rights

section 1983

service of process

civil procedure

constitutional law

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights

prisoner litigation

civil procedure

constitutional law

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the complaint stated a cognizable Eighth Amendment deliberate-indifference claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against the remaining defendants.
2. Whether Clark Kelso was immune from the plaintiff's claims under quasi-judicial immunity.
3. Whether R. Steven Tharratt could be named as a defendant when he died before the action was filed.
4. Whether the action should proceed to service and remain stayed for purposes other than service.

HOLDINGS

1. Liberally construed, the plaintiff's allegations stated a plausible claim for deliberate indifference to his safety, in violation of the Eighth Amendment, against the remaining defendants in their individual capacities.
2. Clark Kelso was dismissed because he was entitled to quasi-judicial immunity.
3. R. Steven Tharratt was dismissed because he died before the action was filed and therefore was not an appropriately named defendant at the inception of the litigation.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"A claim is legally frivolous when it lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact." (at 2)

"To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege two essential elements: (1) that a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States was violated, and (2) that the alleged violation was committed by a person acting under the color of state law." (at 2)

"Liberally construed, plaintiff's allegations state a plausible claim for deliberate indifference to plaintiff's safety, in violation of the Eighth Amendment, against the remaining named defendants in their individual capacities." (at 5)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The plaintiff, a former California prisoner, alleged that defendants participated in transferring more than 100 inmates, including some infected with COVID-19, from California Institution for Men to San Quentin State Prison in May 2020. He alleged inadequate testing and symptom screening, insufficient distancing during

transportation, and inadequate precautions upon arrival, and claimed that he later developed COVID-19 symptoms. He sought compensatory and punitive damages.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The plaintiff filed an action in the Northern District of California alleging that officials transferred prisoners from California Institution for Men to San Quentin State Prison without adequate COVID-19 safeguards. The action was consolidated with related transfer cases under Case No. 5:20-cv-06326-EJD, while the plaintiff's individual docket, No. 5:24-cv-04517-EJD, was closed. After screening, the court dismissed Clark Kelso on quasi-judicial-immunity grounds and R. Steven Tharratt because he had died before the action was filed, found the allegations sufficient to state a deliberate-indifference claim against the remaining defendants, ordered service, and stayed the case except for service.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989)
- Martin v. Sias, 88 F.3d 774, 775
- United States v. Qazi, 975 F.3d 989, 993 (9th Cir. 2020)
- Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 93 (2007)
- Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555, 570 (2007)
- West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988)
- Leadsinger, Inc. v. BMG Music Pub., 512 F.3d 522, 532 (9th Cir. 2008)
- Harris v. Allison, No. 20-CV-09393-CRB, 2022 WL 2232526, at *1 (N.D. Cal. June 7, 2022)
- Transfer Cases, No. 22-mc-80066-WHO at Dkt. No. 63 (N.D. Cal. July 21, 2022)
- Patterson v. Kelso, 698 F. App'x 393, 394 (9th Cir. 2017)
- Reyn's Pasta Bella, LLC v. Visa USA, Inc., 442 F.3d 741, 746 n.6 (9th Cir. 2006)
- Bullock v. Johnson, No. CV 15-2070 PA (AS), 2018 WL 5880736, at *13 n.19 (C.D. Cal. Aug. 10, 2018), report and recommendation adopted, No. CV 15-2070 PA (AS), 2018 WL 4791089 (C.D. Cal. Oct. 3, 2018)
- LN Mgmt., LLC v. JPMorgan Chase Bank, N.A., 957 F.3d 943, 955 (9th Cir. 2020)
- Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 837 (1994)

OPINION

IN RE CIM-SQ TRANSFER CASES

PER CURIAM.

1 2 3

4 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

5 NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

6 7 IN RE CIM-SQ TRANSFER CASES Case No. 5:20-cv-06326-EJD 8 This Document Relates
To: ORDER OF SERVICE 9 5:24-cv-04517-EJD; Calvin v. Allison 10 11 12

13 INTRODUCTION

14 Plaintiff, a former California prisoner, filed a pro se civil rights action alleging that 15
defendants violated his rights under the Eighth Amendment by transferring over 100 inmates, 16
some of whom were infected with COVID-19, from the California Institution for Men¹ (CIM) to
17 San Quentin State Prison (SQSP)² in May 2020. The case is now before the Court for
screening 18 pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), and service of the complaint on defendants is
ordered. 19 This case has been consolidated with cases in this district related to the 2020 prisoner
20 transfer and related to the first case filed, No. 5:20-cv-06326-EJD, which now has the caption
“In 21 Re CIM-SQ Transfer Cases.” Pro se prisoner cases that are part of the consolidated matter
are 22 stayed except for the purposes of service. Service shall therefore proceed in plaintiff’s case
as 23 ordered below, but the case will remain stayed for all other purposes. The docket for Case
No. 24- 24 cv-04517-EJD and all other individual dockets have been closed. If plaintiff wishes to
file any 25 motions, he must file them in Case No. 5:20-cv-06326-EJD and include his original
case number, 26 27 1 The complaint refers to CIM as Chino State Prison or CSP. This Order uses
“CIM.” 1 24-cv-04517-EJD, on the left side of the heading.

2 STANDARD OF REVIEW

3 Although plaintiff is no longer a prisoner, he is proceeding in forma pauperis and his 4 complaint
is therefore subject to screening under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B). Under § 5 1915(e)(2)(B), the
court must dismiss a complaint or portion thereof if the prisoner has raised 6 claims that are
legally “frivolous or malicious,” “fail[] to state a claim upon which relief may be 7 granted,” or
“seek[] monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief.” A claim 8 is legally
frivolous when it lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact. *Neitzke v. Williams*, 9 490 U.S.
319, 325 (1989); *Martin v. Sias*, 88 F.3d 774, 775 (9th Cir. 1996). Pro se pleadings 10 must,
however, be liberally construed. See *United States v. Qazi*, 975 F.3d 989, 993 (9th Cir. 11 2020).
12 Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8(a)(2) requires only “a short and plain statement of the 13
claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2). “Specific facts are not
14 necessary; the statement need only “‘give the defendant fair notice of what the . . . claim is and
the 15 grounds upon which it rests.’” *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. 89, 93 (2007) (citations
omitted). 16 “[A] plaintiff’s obligation to provide the ‘grounds’ of his ‘entitle[ment] to relief’
requires more 17 than labels and conclusions, and a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause
of action will not 18 do. . . . Factual allegations must be enough to raise a right to relief above the
speculative level.” 19 *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007) (citations
omitted). A complaint must 20 proffer “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its
face.” *Id.* at 570. All or part 21 of a complaint filed by a prisoner may be dismissed sua sponte if
the prisoner’s claims lack an 22 arguable basis in either law or in fact. 23 To state a claim under 42
U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege two essential elements: (1) 24 that a right secured by the

Constitution or laws of the United States was violated, and (2) that the 25 alleged violation was committed by a person acting under the color of state law. See *West v. 26 Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988). If a court dismisses a complaint for failure to state a claim, it 27 should “freely give leave” to amend “when justice so requires.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 15(a)(2). A court 1 of the movant, repeated failure to cure deficiencies by amendment previously allowed, undue 2 prejudice to the opposing party by virtue of allowance of the amendment, [and] futility of 3 amendment.” *Leadsinger, Inc. v. BMG Music Pub.*, 512 F.3d 522, 532 (9th Cir. 2008).

4 LEGAL CLAIMS

5 Plaintiff names the following defendants: 6 1. Kathleen Allison, Director of California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

7 (CDCR)

8 2. Ralph Diaz, secretary of CDCR 9 3. Ron Davis, Associate Director of Reception Centers 10 4. Ron Broomfield, Acting Warden at SQSP 11 5. Clark Kelso, Federal Receiver 12 6. A. Pachynski, Chief Medical Officer at SQSP 13 7. L. Escobell, Chief Medical Officer at CIM 14 8. R. Steven Tharratt, Director of CDCR’s Medical Services 15 9. Clarence Cryer, SQSP Healthcare Chief Executive Director 16 10. Dean Borders, Warden at CIM 17 11. Joseph Bick, Director of California Corrections Health Care Services 18 Plaintiff alleges that defendants were each involved in decision-making around and 19 execution of the prisoner transfer from CIM to SQSP without adequate safeguards to prevent 20 COVID transmission. SQSP’s physical attributes made it “not a reasonable option.” Dkt. No. 1 at 21 9. Defendants were responsible for inadequate testing and symptom screening of the prisoners, 22 failure to distance the prisoners on the busses, and failure to take precautions to prevent 23 transmission upon arrival. *Id.* at 9-13. Plaintiff began experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, but 24 has not been able to obtain his medical file. *Id.* at 14, 88. 25 Plaintiff seeks compensatory and punitive damages. *Id.* at 18. 26 Clark Kelso has quasi-judicial immunity and will therefore be dismissed. See *Harris v. 27 Allison*, No. 20-CV-09393-CRB, 2022 WL 2232526, at *1 (N.D. Cal. June 7, 2022) (dismissing 1 Transfer Cases, No. 22-mc-80066-WHO at Dkt. No. 63 (N.D. Cal. July 21, 2022) (same); 2 *Patterson v. Kelso*, 698 F. App’x 393, 394 (9th Cir. 2017) (“Kelso is entitled to quasi-judicial 3 immunity” with respect to negligence claim). 4 Defendant Tharratt will also be dismissed. The Court understands, as the Attorney General 5 has represented to another court in this district, that “[t]o the best of [the Attorney General’s] 6 knowledge, [Dr.] Tharratt died on August 20, 2020.” See Case No. 3:20-cv-07845-CRB, Dkt.

7 Nos. 37, 37-1. The Court takes judicial notice pursuant to Federal Rule of Evidence 201 of the 8 filing in that case, which attaches Dr. Tharratt’s obituary published on the California Department 9 of Corrections and Rehabilitation website on October 6, 2020, available at 10 [https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/insidecdcr/2020/10/06/dr-robert-tharratt-longtime-cchcs-medical-](https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/insidecdcr/2020/10/06/dr-robert-tharratt-longtime-cchcs-medical-director-passes-away/) 11 [director-passes-away/](https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/insidecdcr/2020/10/06/dr-robert-tharratt-longtime-cchcs-medical-director-passes-away/). See *Reyn’s Pasta Bella, LLC v. Visa USA, Inc.*, 442 F.3d 741, 746 n.6 12 (9th Cir. 2006) (federal courts “may take judicial notice of court filings and other matters of public

13 record”); *Bullock v. Johnson*, No. CV 15-2070 PA (AS), 2018 WL 5880736, at *13 n.19 (C.D. 14 Cal. Aug. 10, 2018), report and recommendation adopted, No. CV 15-2070 PA (AS), 2018 WL 15 4791089 (C.D. Cal. Oct. 3, 2018) (taking judicial notice of CDCR obituary). 16 Dr. Tharratt’s death therefore preceded the filing of this action. See Dkt. No. 1. “[A] party 17 cannot maintain a suit on behalf of, or against, or join, a dead person, or in any other way make a 18 dead person (in that person’s own right, and not through a properly represented estate or 19 successor) party to a federal lawsuit.” *LN Mgmt., LLC v. JPMorgan Chase Bank, N.A.*, 957 F.3d 20 943, 955 (9th Cir. 2020). Defendant Tharratt was therefore not an appropriately named defendant 21 at the onset of this litigation and will be dismissed. 22 Liberally construed, plaintiff’s allegations state a plausible claim for deliberate 23 indifference to plaintiff’s safety, in violation of the Eighth Amendment, against the remaining 24 named defendants in their individual capacities. *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 837 (1994).

25 CONCLUSION

26 1. Defendants Clark Kelso and R. Steven Tharratt are DISMISSED. 27 2. Plaintiff has stated a cognizable claim against remaining defendants for violation of 1 3. The Court orders that service on the following defendants shall proceed under the 2 California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation’s (“CDCR”) e-service program for civil 3 rights cases from prisoners in the CDCR’s custody: 4 a. Kathleen Allison 5 b. Ralph Diaz 6 c. Ron Davis 7 d. Ron Broomfield 8 e. A. Pachynski 9 f. L. Escobell 10 g. Clarence Cryer 11 h. Dean Borders 12 i. Joseph Bick 13 In accordance with the program, the clerk is directed to serve on the CDCR via email the 14 following documents: the operative complaint (Dkt. No. 1 in case 24-cv-04517-EJD), this Order 15 of Service, a CDCR Report of E-Service Waiver form, and a summons. The clerk also shall serve 16 a copy of this order on the plaintiff. 17 No later than 40 days after service of this order via email on the CDCR, the CDCR shall 18 provide the court a completed CDCR Report of E-Service Waiver advising the court which 19 defendant(s) listed in this order will be waiving service of process without the need for service by 20 the USMS and which defendant(s) decline to waive service or could not be reached. The CDCR 21 also shall provide a copy of the CDCR Report of E-Service Waiver to the California Attorney 22 General’s Office which, within 21 days, shall file with the Court a waiver of service of process for 23 the defendant(s) who are waiving service. 24 Upon receipt of the CDCR Report of E-Service Waiver, the clerk shall prepare for each 25 defendant who has not waived service according to the CDCR Report of E-Service Waiver a 26 USM-285 Form. The clerk shall provide to the USMS the completed USM-285 forms and copies 27 of this order, the summons and the operative complaint for service upon each defendant who has] Service Waiver. 2 4. All defendants are cautioned that Rule 4 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure 3 || requires them to cooperate in saving unnecessary costs of service of the summons and complaint. 4 Pursuant to Rule 4, if defendants, after being notified of this action and asked by the Court, on 5 || behalf of plaintiff, to waive service of the summons, fail to do so, they will be required to bear the 6 || cost of such service unless good cause can be shown for their failure to

sign and return the waiver 7 || form. 8 5. All communications by plaintiff with the Court must be served on defendants' 9 || counsel by mailing a true copy of the document to defendants' counsel. The Court may disregard 10 || any document which a party files but fails to send a copy of to his opponent. Until defendants' 11 counsel has been designated, plaintiff may mail a true copy of the document directly to 12 || defendants, but once defendants are represented by counsel, all documents must be mailed to 13 counsel rather than directly to defendants. 14 6. Plaintiff is responsible for prosecuting this case. Plaintiff must promptly keep the 15 Court informed of any change of address and must comply with the Court's orders in a timely a 16 || fashion. Failure to do so may result in the dismissal of this action for failure to prosecute pursuant 2 17 || to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(b). Plaintiff must file a notice of change of address in every Z 18 || pending case every time he is moved to a new facility. 19 7. Any motion for an extension of time must be filed no later than the deadline sought 20 || to be extended and must be accompanied by a showing of good cause. Plaintiff is cautioned that 21 he must include the case name and case number for this case on any document he submits to the 22 || Court for consideration in this case. 23 8. The case will remain stayed for all purposes other than service of the complaint on 24 || defendants. 25 IT IS SO ORDERED. 26 Dated: May 8, 2025 □□□□

EDWARD J. DAVILA

27 United States District Judge 28