

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF
FLORIDA, TAMPA DIVISION

Deanthony A. Jackson, Robert Davis, Norman Sawyers, and Calvin
Martin v. Judge Stephen Whyte, et al.

Jackson v. Whyte · No. 8:26-cv-152-JLB-AAS · Decided February 11, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Middle District of Florida dismissed without prejudice a single § 1983 complaint filed jointly by four pretrial detainees. The court held that the Prison Litigation Reform Act requires each prisoner to file a separate action and pay the full filing fee or individually seek in forma pauperis status. The court also denied the motion to initiate a class action because pro se prisoners may not represent other inmates.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Middle District of Florida, Tampa Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	John L. Badalamenti
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Middle District of Florida, Tampa Division
DECIDED	February 11, 2026
DOCKET	8:26-cv-152-JLB-AAS
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Multiple pretrial detainees filed a single pro se 42 U.S.C. § 1983 complaint and moved to initiate a class action. The district court dismissed the complaint without prejudice and denied the class-action motion.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown; district court order with no reporter or neutral citation.
PARTIES	Deanthony A. Jackson, Robert Davis, Norman Sawyers, Calvin Martin v. Judge Stephen Whyte, et al.

TOPICS

- class actions
- civil procedure
- section 1983
- prisoners rights

PRACTICE AREAS

Civil procedure

Prisoner civil rights

Federal courts

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether multiple prisoners may join their claims in one action to avoid separate filing-fee obligations under the Prison Litigation Reform Act.
2. Whether pro se prisoners may represent other prisoners in a class action.
3. Whether the jointly filed complaint should be dismissed without prejudice and the class-action motion denied.

HOLDINGS

1. Multiple prisoners may not avoid payment of the filing fee by joining their claims in a single action; each prisoner must file a separate action and remain responsible for the full filing fee or individually seek in forma pauperis status.
2. A pro se prisoner may not represent the interests of other prisoners in a class action.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Thus, to comply with the PLRA, each prisoner must file a separate action in which he is responsible for the full filing fee.” (at 1)

“a pro se plaintiff may not represent the interests of other prisoners.” (at 1-2)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Deanthony Jackson, Robert Davis, Norman Sawyers, and Calvin Martin were pretrial detainees at Manatee County Jail who filed one pro se complaint under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Their allegations challenged their ongoing criminal proceedings and included claims involving speedy-trial violations, unlawful detention, access to discovery, conspiracy, and ineffective assistance of counsel. Plaintiffs neither paid the filing fee nor sought in forma pauperis status, and they also moved to initiate a class action on behalf of themselves and other detainees.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiffs, who were pretrial detainees at Manatee County Jail, jointly filed a civil-rights complaint challenging aspects of their separate criminal proceedings. They did not pay the filing fee or move to proceed in forma pauperis. The district court dismissed the complaint without prejudice because the Prison Litigation Reform Act does not permit multiple prisoners to join claims in one action to avoid separate filing-fee obligations, and denied the request to initiate a class action because a pro se prisoner cannot represent other prisoners.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Hubbard v. Haley, 262 F.3d 1194, 1198 (11th Cir. 2001)
- Wallace v. Smith, 145 F. App'x 300, 302 (11th Cir. 2005) (per curiam)
- Oxendine v. Williams, 509 F.2d 1405, 1407 (4th Cir. 1975)

OPINION

Whyte

PER CURIAM.

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

MIDDLE DISTRICT OF FLORIDA

TAMPA DIVISION

DEANTHONY A. JACKSON, et al., Plaintiffs, v. CASE NO. 8:26-cv-152-JLB-AAS JUDGE
STEPHEN WHYTE, et al., Defendants. _____/

ORDER

Plaintiffs Deanthony Jackson, Robert Davis, Norman Sawyers, and Calvin Martin are pre-trial detainees at Manatee County Jail (MCJ) who initiated this action, pro se, by filing a single complaint under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 (Doc. 1) and a motion to initiate a class action lawsuit. (Doc. 2). Plaintiffs neither paid the filing fee nor moved to proceed in forma pauperis. Allegations Each Plaintiff challenges their current criminal proceedings. Plaintiff Davis alleges that Judge Whyte has conspired with the victim and the prosecutor to violate his supervised release, prevent him from accessing exculpatory evidence, and deny him a dismissal of the charges based on a speedy trial violation. Plaintiff Jackson alleges that Judge Mecurio and 1 Public Defender Lerry Egen have conspired to keep him illegally detained. Plaintiff Sawyer alleges that Assistant Public Defender Tamayo rendered ineffective assistance by failing to raise a viable defense. And Plaintiff Martin alleges that Assistant Public Defender Wright rendered ineffective assistance by failing to show him discovery and by failing to file a motion to dismiss the charges against him. Discussion The complaint must be dismissed without prejudice. The Prison Litigation Reform Act of 1995 (PLRA) prohibits multiple prisoners from avoiding payment of a filing fee by joining claims in a single case. See Hubbard v. Haley, 262 F.3d 1194, 1198 (11th Cir. 2001). Thus, to comply with the PLRA, each prisoner must file a separate action in which he is responsible for the full filing fee. See id. (upholding the district court's dismissal of the lawsuit wherein the multiple-prisoner plaintiffs sought to proceed together in forma pauperis). To the extent that Plaintiffs seek to bring a class action on behalf of themselves and other detainees at MCJ, a pro se plaintiff may not represent the interests of other prisoners. See, e.g., Wallace v. Smith, 145 F. App'x 300, 302 (11th Cir. 2005) (per curiam) (citing Oxendine v. Williams, 509 F.2d 1405, 2 1407 (4th Cir. 1975) ("plain error to permit [an] imprisoned litigant who is unassisted by counsel to represent his fellow inmates in a class action")). Accordingly, it is ORDERED that:

1. The complaint (Doc. 1) is DISMISSED WITHOUT PREJUDICE.

Each Plaintiff may re-file by individually filing his complaint in a new case with a new case number and either paying the full filing fee or submitting an individual motion to proceed in forma pauperis with a supporting financial affidavit if he cannot afford to pay the filing fee in its entirety.

2. The motion to initiate a class action lawsuit (Doc. 2) is DENIED.

3. The Clerk is DIRECTED to (1) close this case and (2) send to each plaintiff a civil rights complaint form and a motion for leave to proceed in forma pauperis form with their copies of this Order. DONE and ORDERED in Tampa, Florida, on February 11, 2026.

JOHN L. BADALAMENTI

UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE