

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF  
INDIANA, SOUTH BEND DIVISION

William David Heffley v. Matt Traster, et al.

No. 1:25-CV-00433-CCB-SJF (N.D. Ind. Mar. 24, 2026) · No. 1:25-CV-00433-CCB-SJF · Decided March 24, 2026

SUMMARY

The court denied William David Heffley’s motion to proceed in forma pauperis and dismissed without prejudice his civil-rights complaint against Matt Traster, Neal Blythe, and Kevin Likes. The court held that the claims against the prosecutor were barred by absolute immunity, the allegations against the other defendants were conclusory, and Younger abstention required the court to refrain from interfering with Heffley’s ongoing state criminal prosecution.

CASE DETAILS

|                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| COURT                 | United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana, South Bend Division                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| WRITING FOR THE COURT | Cristal C. Brisco                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| JURISDICTION          | United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana, South Bend Division                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| DECIDED               | March 24, 2026                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| DOCKET                | 1:25-CV-00433-CCB-SJF                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| DISPOSITION           | dismissed                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| PROCEDURAL POSTURE    | Pro se plaintiff filed a civil-rights complaint under 42 U.S.C. §§ 1983 and 1985 and moved for leave to proceed in forma pauperis. The district court screened the complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), denied in forma pauperis status, dismissed the complaint without prejudice, and abstained under Younger because plaintiff’s related state criminal prosecution was ongoing. |
| STANDARD OF REVIEW    | The court screened the complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and applied the Rule 8(a)(2) plausibility standard, accepting well-pleaded factual allegations as true but rejecting conclusory allegations.                                                                                                                                                                             |
| PRECEDENTIAL VALUE    | nonprecedential                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| PARTIES               | William David Heffley v. Matt Traster, Neal Blythe, Kevin Likes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

## TOPICS

pleadings

civil procedure

section 1983

first amendment

due process

## PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

constitutional law

civil rights

federal courts

criminal procedure

## QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the complaint stated plausible claims under 42 U.S.C. §§ 1983 and 1985 against the defendants.
2. Whether prosecutor Neal Blythe was absolutely immune from claims arising from initiating and prosecuting the pending criminal case.
3. Whether the federal court was required to abstain under *Younger v. Harris* from hearing claims seeking to interfere with the ongoing state criminal prosecution.
4. Whether Heffley should be permitted to proceed in forma pauperis under 28 U.S.C. § 1915.

## HOLDINGS

1. The complaint failed to state plausible claims against Traster and Likes because its allegations were conclusory and did not identify what either defendant specifically did, when the conduct occurred, or how the conduct demonstrated an agreement to retaliate.
2. Blythe was entitled to absolute immunity under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 for conduct related to initiating and prosecuting the state criminal case.
3. The court was required to abstain from hearing Heffley's claims because his state criminal prosecution was ongoing and his requested injunction would interfere with that proceeding.
4. Heffley's motion for leave to proceed in forma pauperis was denied because the complaint failed to state a claim and sought monetary relief against an immune defendant.

## KEY QUOTATIONS

*“The statement must contain enough factual matter, accepted as true, to state a plausible claim, not a speculative one.”*

*“Younger “directs federal courts to abstain from exercising jurisdiction over federal claims that seek to interfere with pending state court proceedings.””*

*“Although [pro se] litigants . . . benefit from various procedural protections,” including liberal construction of pleadings, they “are not entitled to [exemption] from the rules of procedure . . . .”*

## FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Heffley alleged that he reported Matt Traster, the City of Butler's chief of police, for sexual misconduct with minors and that Traster, prosecutor Neal Blythe, and defense attorney Kevin Likes conspired to retaliate against him through a pending Indiana criminal prosecution. He alleged that Blythe initiated the prosecution for retaliatory purposes and withheld exculpatory evidence, engaged in improper communications, and acted with

bias. He alleged that Traster permitted harassment and that Likes provided ineffective assistance and acted with divided loyalties. The state criminal prosecution remained pending, with a jury trial scheduled for May 7, 2026.

#### PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Heffley filed the complaint on August 18, 2025, alleging that the defendants conspired to retaliate against him through an ongoing Indiana criminal prosecution and violated his First, Sixth, and Fourteenth Amendment rights. He simultaneously moved to proceed in forma pauperis. The district court determined that the complaint failed to state plausible claims, sought monetary relief against an immune defendant, and sought federal interference with a pending state criminal proceeding. The court denied the in forma pauperis motion, dismissed the complaint without prejudice, abstained under *Younger*, and directed the clerk to close the case.

#### DISPOSITION

dismissed

#### CASES CITED

- *Adkins v. E.I. DuPont de Nemours & Co.*, 335 U.S. 331, 339 (1948)
- *Hoskins v. Poelstra*, 320 F.3d 761, 763 (7th Cir. 2003)
- *Jones v. Phipps*, 39 F.3d 158, 163 (7th Cir. 1994)
- *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009)
- *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555, 570 (2007)
- *Imbler v. Pachtman*, 424 U.S. 409, 430-31 (1976)
- *Younger v. Harris*, 401 U.S. 37, 43-44, 53-54 (1971)
- *J.B. v. Woodard*, 997 F.3d 714, 722 (7th Cir. 2021)
- *Kugler v. Helfant*, 421 U.S. 117, 125 (1975)

#### OPINION

Heffley

PER CURIAM.

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

NORTHERN DISTRICT OF INDIANA

SOUTH BEND DIVISION

WILLIAM DAVID HEFFLEY,

Plaintiff, v. Case No. 1:25-CV-00433-CCB-SJF MATT TRASTER, et al., Defendants.

#### OPINION AND ORDER

On August 18, 2025, William David Heffley, proceeding pro se, filed a complaint (ECF 1) alleging that the Defendants conspired to deprive him of his First, Sixth, and Fourteenth Amendment rights. (ECF 1 at 2–3). Along with the complaint, Heffley filed a motion for leave to proceed in forma pauperis (ECF 2). He is subject to an ongoing state criminal prosecution with a jury trial

scheduled for May 7, 2026 in *State of Indiana v. William David Heffley*, Case Number 17D01-2505-F6-000113 before DeKalb Superior Court 1. Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(1), the Court “may authorize the commencement [of a civil lawsuit] without pre-payment of fees [if] the person is unable to pay such fees . . . .” A person is unable to pay the filing fee if “because of his poverty [doing so would result in the inability] to provide himself and dependents with the necessities of life.” *Adkins v. E.I. DuPont de Nemours & Co.*, 335 U.S. 331, 339 (1948) (quotations omitted). When deciding whether to grant in forma pauperis status to a plaintiff, the Court must first determine whether his complaint is frivolous or malicious, fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief against an immune defendant. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B). The Court has “ample authority to dismiss frivolous or transparently defective suits spontaneously.” *Hoskins v. Poelstra*, 320 F.3d 761, 763 (7th Cir. 2003). “Although [pro se] litigants . . . benefit from various procedural protections,” including liberal construction of pleadings, they “are not entitled to [exemption] from the rules of procedure . . . .” *Jones v. Phipps*, 39 F.3d 158, 163 (7th Cir. 1994). Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2) requires that complaints contain “a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.” The statement must contain enough factual matter, accepted as true, to state a plausible claim, not a speculative one. *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009); *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007). Heffley has sued Defendants Matt Traster, Neal Blythe, and Kevin Likes under 42 U.S.C. §§ 1983 and 1985. Heffley claims he reported Defendant Traster, the City of Butler’s Chief of Police, for sexual misconduct with minors and that all three Defendants conspired to retaliate against him through a state prosecution. (ECF 1 at 2). He alleges this retaliation violated his rights to free speech, effective counsel, and due process. (Id.) He asks the Court for an injunction “prohibiting further retaliation,” a declaration that the Defendants’ conduct violated his constitutional rights, compensatory damages, punitive damages, and costs and fees under 42 U.S.C. § 1988. (Id. at 3). Heffley alleges that Defendant Blythe initiated the state prosecution against him “for retaliatory purposes” and deprived him of a fair trial through “the withholding of exculpatory evidence, improper communications, and bias.” (Id. at 2, 3). But prosecutors receive absolute immunity under § 1983 for conduct that is “intimately associated with the judicial phase of the criminal process,” which includes “initiating a prosecution and . . . presenting the State’s case.” *Imbler v. Pachtman*, 424 U.S. 409, 430–31 (1976). And claims cannot be stated against immune defendants. Heffley’s allegations against Blythe are directly related to Blythe’s role as a prosecutor in the ongoing state prosecution. Blythe is therefore entitled to absolute immunity for actions related to the prosecution. Thus, Heffley fails to state a claim against Blythe. Heffley also alleges that Defendant Traster “directed or knowingly permitted” his officers to harass Heffley and that Defendant Likes “failed to provide effective assistance of counsel” by “act[ing] with divided loyalties” and undermining his defense through improper communications with the prosecution. (ECF 1 at 2). A complaint must include enough facts to make a claim plausible, and Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2) “demands more than an unadorned, the-defendant-unlawfully-harmed-me accusation.”

Ashcroft, 556 U.S. at 662 (quoting *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007)). Heffley's allegations against Likes and Traster are conclusory. He does not allege what either Defendant specifically did, when they did it, or how their actions show an agreement to retaliate against him. Without any factual support, Heffley fails to state a plausible claim against Likes and Traster. Finally, this Court must refrain from hearing Heffley's case under the Younger abstention doctrine because his criminal case is ongoing. *Younger v. Harris*, 401 U.S. 37, 53–54 (1971). By requesting an injunction, Heffley asks the Court to interfere with the state prosecution. Younger “directs federal courts to abstain from exercising jurisdiction over federal claims that seek to interfere with pending state court proceedings.” *J.B. v. Woodard*, 997 F.3d 714, 722 (7th Cir. 2021) (citing *Younger v. Harris*, 401 U.S. 37, 43–44 (1971)). This directive to abstain from interfering with pending state court proceedings can only be avoided under truly compelling circumstances. *Younger*, 401 U.S. at 53–54. “[S]uch circumstances must be ‘extraordinary’ in the sense of creating an extraordinarily pressing need for immediate federal equitable relief, not merely in the sense of presenting a highly unusual factual situation.” *Kugler v. Helfant*, 421 U.S. 117, 125 (1975). Heffley does not allege any facts indicating such extraordinary circumstances apply here. For these reasons, Heffley's motion for leave to proceed in forma pauperis is DENIED. (ECF 2). His complaint does not state any claims for which relief may be granted and seeks monetary relief against an immune defendant. Accordingly, the Complaint is DISMISSED WITHOUT PREJUDICE and the Court ABSTAINS from hearing this case under the Younger abstention doctrine. The Clerk is DIRECTED to close this case. SO ORDERED on March 24, 2026. /s/Cristal C. Brisco  
CRISTAL C. BRISCO, JUDGE  
UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT