

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Valenzuela v. Thorntona

Valenzuela · No. 2:23-cv-02494-DAD-EFB (PC) · Decided February 21, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California dismissed Mario Valenzuela’s amended prisoner complaint with leave to amend. The court held that the allegations did not state cognizable claims under the Eighth Amendment, the ADA, the Rehabilitation Act, supervisory-liability principles, or municipal-liability principles, and that the court could not address state-law claims absent a viable federal claim.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	February 21, 2025
DOCKET	2:23-cv-02494-DAD-EFB (PC)
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Prisoner civil-rights action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. On preliminary screening under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, the court dismissed the amended complaint for failure to state a cognizable claim, granted leave to amend, and addressed the application to proceed in forma pauperis.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court applied the preliminary prisoner-complaint screening standard under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A and the Rule 8(a) and Rule 12(b) (6)-type plausibility standard. Allegations were accepted as true and construed in the light most favorable to plaintiff.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district-court order; precedential status unknown
PARTIES	Mario Valenzuela v. Thorntona, Stephens, Xiong, Sergeant Akins, Gavin Newsom, Jeff Lynch, County of Sacramento

TOPICS

- prisoners rights
- section 1983
- ada / disability
- civil procedure
- pleadings

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the amended complaint stated an Eighth Amendment deliberate-indifference claim based on an approximately 20-minute delay in responding to plaintiff's suicidal ideations.
2. Whether the allegations stated an ADA or Rehabilitation Act claim based on an alleged failure to accommodate or delay in providing mental-health treatment.
3. Whether the allegations stated claims against supervisory defendants without allegations of personal involvement or a sufficient causal connection.
4. Whether the allegations stated a municipal-liability claim against the County of Sacramento without identifying a county policy or custom that caused the alleged injury.
5. Whether the court could exercise supplemental jurisdiction over the state-law claims when no federal claim was cognizable.
6. Whether plaintiff should be granted leave to amend.

HOLDINGS

1. The amended complaint failed to state a cognizable Eighth Amendment deliberate-indifference claim because plaintiff alleged only a 20-minute delay in receiving care and did not allege facts showing that the delay caused further injury or greater harm.
2. The amended complaint failed to state ADA or Rehabilitation Act claims because it alleged only delayed access to medical care needed for plaintiff's disability, not disability discrimination or denial of a reasonable accommodation for a service or program plaintiff was otherwise qualified to receive.
3. The claims against Lynch, Akins, and Newsom failed because § 1983 does not impose respondeat superior liability and the complaint did not allege their personal involvement or a sufficient causal connection to the alleged constitutional violation.
4. The claim against Sacramento County failed because plaintiff did not allege that a county policy or custom caused his injury.
5. Because plaintiff had not stated a cognizable federal claim, the court lacked a basis to address the related state-law claims under supplemental jurisdiction.
6. The complaint was dismissed with leave to amend within 30 days.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Plaintiff’s complaint lacks facts that would show that he suffered greater harm due to the 20-minute delay than he would have if there had been no delay.” (at 4)

“A plaintiff can allege disability discrimination in the provision of inmate services, programs, or activities under the ADA or the Rehabilitation Act by pleading either (1) discrimination based on disparate treatment or impact, or (2) denial of reasonable modifications or accommodations.” (at 6)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Valenzuela alleged that while he was experiencing suicidal ideations, correctional officer Thorntona ignored his repeated requests for help for approximately 20 minutes. He alleged that Stephens and Xiong also failed to respond appropriately and that defendants violated departmental policies concerning restraints, a holding log, and mental-health personnel. He asserted Eighth Amendment, ADA, Rehabilitation Act, and California-law claims, but described his resulting physical and emotional injuries only conclusorily.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Valenzuela, a state prisoner proceeding pro se, filed a § 1983 complaint and an application to proceed in forma pauperis. The court granted in forma pauperis status and screened the amended complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A. The court concluded that the allegations did not state cognizable Eighth Amendment, ADA, Rehabilitation Act, supervisory-liability, municipal-liability, or related state-law claims, but dismissed the complaint with leave to amend within 30 days.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 554, 562-63 (2007)
- Conley v. Gibson, 355 U.S. 41 (1957)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678-79 (2009)
- Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89 (2007)
- Scheuer v. Rhodes, 416 U.S. 232, 236 (1974)
- Jett v. Penner, 439 F.3d 1091, 1096 (9th Cir. 2006)
- Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 106 (1976)
- Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 837 (1994)
- Hallett v. Morgan, 296 F.3d 732, 746 (9th Cir. 2002)
- Shapley v. Nevada Board of State Prison Commissioners, 766 F.2d 404, 407 (9th Cir. 1985) (per curiam)
- Duffy v. Riveland, 98 F.3d 447, 455-56 (9th Cir. 1996)
- Thompson v. Davis, 295 F.3d 890, 895 (9th Cir. 2002)
- Updike v. Multnomah County, 870 F.3d 939, 949 (9th Cir. 2017)
- Vos v. City of Newport Beach, 892 F.3d 1024, 1036 (9th Cir. 2018)
- Douglas v. California Department of Youth Authority, 285 F.3d 1226, 1229 n.3 (9th Cir. 2002)
- Pierce v. County of Orange, 526 F.3d 1190, 1215 (9th Cir. 2008)
- Dunlap v. Association of Bay Area Governments, 996 F. Supp. 962, 965 (N.D. Cal. 1998)
- Robertson v. Las Animas County Sheriff's Department, 500 F.3d 1185, 1196 (10th Cir. 2007)
- O'Guinn v. Nevada Department of Corrections, 468 F. App'x 651, 653 (9th Cir. 2012)

- *Atayde v. Napa State Hospital*, 255 F. Supp. 3d 978, 1001-03 (E.D. Cal. 2017)
- *Felarca v. Birgeneau*, 891 F.3d 809, 819-20 (9th Cir. 2018)
- *Castro v. County of Los Angeles*, 833 F.3d 1060, 1073 (9th Cir. 2016) (en banc)
- *Monell v. Department of Social Services*, 436 U.S. 658, 694 (1978)
- *Endy v. County of Los Angeles*, 975 F.3d 757, 769 (9th Cir. 2020)
- *Garmon v. County of Los Angeles*, 828 F.3d 837, 845 (9th Cir. 2016)
- *Johnson v. Duffy*, 588 F.2d 740, 743 (9th Cir. 1978)
- *George v. Smith*, 507 F.3d 605, 607 (7th Cir. 2007)
- *Forsyth v. Humana*, 114 F.3d 1467, 1474 (9th Cir. 1997)
- *Loux v. Rhay*, 375 F.2d 55, 57 (9th Cir. 1967)

OPINION

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT 9 FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA 10 11 MARIO VALENZUELA, No. 2:23-cv-02494-DAD-EFB (PC) 12 Plaintiff,
13 v. ORDER 14 THORNTONA, et al., 15 Defendants. 16 17 Plaintiff is a state prisoner
proceeding without counsel in an action brought under 42 18 U.S.C. § 1983.

In addition to filing a complaint, plaintiff has filed an application to proceed in 19 forma pauperis
pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915. ECF Nos. 2, 6. 20 Leave to Proceed In Forma Pauperis 21
Plaintiff’s application makes the showing required by 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(1) and (2). 22
Accordingly, by separate order, the court directs the agency having custody of plaintiff to collect
23 and forward the appropriate monthly payments for the filing fee as set forth in 28 U.S.C. § 24
1915(b)(1) and (2).

25 Screening Standards 26 Federal courts must engage in a preliminary screening of cases in
which prisoners seek 27 redress from a governmental entity or officer or employee of a
governmental entity. 28 U.S.C. 28 § 1915A(a).

The court must identify cognizable claims or dismiss the complaint, or any portion 1 of the
complaint, if the complaint “is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which 2 relief
may be granted,” or “seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such 3 relief.”
Id. § 1915A(b). 4 A pro se plaintiff, like other litigants, must satisfy the pleading requirements of
Rule 8(a) 5 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.

Rule 8(a)(2) “requires a complaint to include a short and 6 plain statement of the claim showing
that the pleader is entitled to relief, in order to give the 7 defendant fair notice of what the claim is
and the grounds upon which it rests.” *Bell Atl. Corp. v. 8 Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 554, 562-563
(2007) (citing *Conley v. Gibson*, 355 U.S. 41 (1957)). 9 While the complaint must comply with the
“short and plain statement” requirements of Rule 8, 10 its allegations must also include the
specificity required by *Twombly* and *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 11 U.S. 662, 679 (2009).

12 To avoid dismissal for failure to state a claim a complaint must contain more than “naked 13 assertions,” “labels and conclusions” or “a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of 14 action.” *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555-557.

In other words, “[t]hreadbare recitals of the elements of 15 a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements do not suffice.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 16 678. 17 Furthermore, a claim upon which the court can grant relief must have facial plausibility. 18 *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 570. “A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual 19 content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the 20 misconduct alleged.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678.

When considering whether a complaint states a 21 claim upon which relief can be granted, the court must accept the allegations as true, *Erickson v. 22 Pardus*, 551 U.S. 89 (2007), and construe the complaint in the light most favorable to the 23 plaintiff, see *Scheuer v. Rhodes*, 416 U.S. 232, 236 (1974). 24 Screening Order 25 Plaintiff alleges the following. Defendant correctional officer Thorntona approached 26 plaintiff’s cell door at approximately 4:10 p.m. on April 30, 2023 during “feeding time.” ECF 27 No. 13 at 5.

Plaintiff was experiencing suicidal ideations and yelled multiple times for help. *Id.* 28 Thorntona ignored plaintiff’s “pleas for assistance” for 20 minutes. *Id.* 1 Defendant correctional officer Stephens arrived, and plaintiff informed him of his urgent 2 need for medical attention. *Id.* Stephens apologized, admitting that he should have been 3 monitoring plaintiff but was otherwise engaged.

Id. 4 Defendant correctional officer Xiong “was in proximity and could hear plaintiff’s cries for 5 help but also failed to respond appropriately.” *Id.* 6 Defendants “violated D.O.M. policies by failing to secure plaintiff in restraints, failing to 7 start a holding log, and failing to involve mental health personnel upon being informed of 8 plaintiff’s suicidal ideations.” *Id.* at 2.

Plaintiff seeks to impose supervisory liability on 9 defendants Sergeant Akins, Gavin Newsom, Jeff Lynch, and the County of Sacramento. *Id.* He 10 alleges that he “suffered physical and emotional injuries” as a result of the incident but does not 11 further elaborate on those injuries. *Id.* at 6. 12 Plaintiff asserts claims under the Eighth Amendment, the Americans with Disabilities Act 13 (“ADA”), the Rehabilitation Act (“RA”), and California law.

14 To succeed on an Eighth Amendment claim predicated on indifference to medical needs, a 15 plaintiff must establish that: (1) he had a serious medical need and (2) the defendant’s response to 16 that need was deliberately indifferent. *Jett v. Penner*, 439 F.3d 1091, 1096 (9th Cir. 2006); see 17 also *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 106 (1976). A serious medical need exists if the failure to 18 treat the condition could result in further significant injury or the unnecessary and wanton 19 infliction of pain.

Jett, 439 F.3d at 1096. To act with deliberate indifference, a prison official must both be aware of facts from which the inference could be drawn that a substantial risk of serious harm exists, and he must also draw the inference. *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 837 (1994). Plaintiff's allegations fail to state a cognizable claim for deliberate indifference in violation of the Eighth Amendment.

Plaintiff does not allege that he was denied care for his suicidal ideations, but only that such care was delayed by 20 minutes. Where a prisoner alleges that delay of medical treatment evinces deliberate indifference, he must also allege that the delay led to further injury. See *Hallett v. Morgan*, 296 F.3d 732, 746 (9th Cir. 2002) ("Plaintiffs could not prove an Eighth Amendment violation because they have not demonstrated that delays occurred to patients with problems so severe that delays would cause significant harm and that Defendants should have known this to be the case."); *Shapley v. Nev. Bd. of State Prison Comm'rs*, 766 F.2d 404, 407 (9th Cir.

1985) (per curiam) (holding that a mere delay of surgery did not give rise to an Eighth Amendment claim unless the delay was harmful). Plaintiff's complaint lacks facts that would show that he suffered greater harm due to the 20-minute delay than he would have if there had been no delay.

In addition, plaintiff's conclusory allegation that he suffered "physical and emotional injuries" is insufficient to support a deliberate indifference claim, he must state the injuries he suffered as a result of defendants' conduct. *Id.* The ADA prohibits public entities, which include state prisons, from discriminating against qualified disabled individuals by excluding them from or denying them the benefits of services, programs, or activities of the public entities.

42 U.S.C. § 12132; *Duffy v. Riveland*, 98 F.3d 447, 455-56 (9th Cir. 1996). To allege a violation of the ADA, a plaintiff must state facts showing that (1) he is disabled; (2) he is otherwise qualified to participate; (3) the defendant prevented his participation in or denied him the benefits of a service, program, or activity or otherwise subjected him to discrimination; (4) the defendant's decision was based on plaintiff's disability.

Thompson v. Davis, 295 F.3d 890, 895 (9th Cir. 2002). Section 504 of the RA provides: "No otherwise qualified individual with a disability... shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance[.]" 29 U.S.C. § 794.

To state a § 504 claim, a plaintiff must allege facts showing that (1) he is an individual with a disability; (2) he is otherwise qualified to receive the benefit; (3) he was denied the benefits of

the program solely by reason of his disability; and (4) 23 the program receives federal financial assistance. *Uptake v. Multnomah Cty.*, 870 F.3d 939, 949 24 (9th Cir.

2017). 25 Courts analyze ADA and Rehabilitation Act claims together because the statutes provide 26 identical remedies, procedures and rights, and the cases interpreting either are interchangeable. 27 *Vos v. City of Newport Beach*, 892 F.3d 1024, 1036 (9th Cir. 2018) (internal quotation marks 28 omitted); *Douglas v. Cal. Dep't of Youth Auth.*, 285 F.3d 1226, 1229 n.3 (9th Cir.

2002) (internal 1 quotation marks omitted). 2 Both the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act apply in the context of correctional facilities and 3 prohibit disabled inmates from being excluded from participation in inmate services, programs, or 4 activities, including medical programs, for which they are otherwise qualified. *Pierce v. County 5 of Orange*, 526 F.3d 1190, 1215 (9th Cir.

2008). A plaintiff can allege disability discrimination 6 in the provision of inmate services, programs, or activities under the ADA or the Rehabilitation 7 Act by pleading either (1) discrimination based on disparate treatment or impact, or (2) denial of 8 reasonable modifications or accommodations. *Dunlap v. Ass'n of Bay Area Gov'ts*, 996 F. Supp. 9 962, 965 (N.D.

Cal. 1998) (“[T]he ADA not only protects against disparate treatment, it also 10 creates an affirmative duty in some circumstances to provide special, preferred treatment, or 11 ‘reasonable accommodation.’”). 12 Plaintiff asserts that defendants failed to accommodate him in violation of the ADA and 13 Rehabilitation Act.

To plead such a claim, a plaintiff must allege that a public entity knew of 14 plaintiff's disability but failed to provide reasonable accommodations that would allow the 15 plaintiff to access services, programs, etc. that the plaintiff was otherwise qualified to access. See 16 *Robertson v. Las Animas Cnty. Sheriff's Dep't*, 500 F.3d 1185, 1196 (9th Cir. 2007).

17 “[K]ey elements of an ADA or RA claim cannot be reconciled with medical treatment 18 decisions for the underlying disability.” *O’Guinn v. Nev. Dep’t of Corr.*, 468 Fed. Appx. 651, 19 653 (9th Cir. 2012).¹ Thus, a plaintiff’s claim that he was discriminatorily denied mental health 20 treatment because of his mental health disability does not lie under the ADA or RA, because the 21 plaintiff needed the treatment only because he was disabled and was not, therefore, “otherwise 22 qualified” to receive the treatment.

Id. See also *Atayde v. Napa State Hosp.*, 255 F. Supp. 3d 23 978, 1001-02 (E.D. Cal. 2017) (collecting cases). In some circumstances, a denial of medical 24 care that is “so extreme as to suggest discriminatory refusal to accommodate a disability-related 25 need, such as when a disabled detainee is denied a broad range of medical services beyond those 26 necessary for treating his underlying disability” may state a cognizable ADA and RA claim.

27 1 “A court may not prohibit or restrict the citation of federal judicial opinions ... 28 designated as ‘unpublished’ ... and issued on or after January 1, 2007.” Fed. R. App. Proc. 32.1. 1 Atayde, 255 F. Supp. 3d at 1001-03. 2 Plaintiff’s allegations do not meet these standards.

Because he alleges only that 3 defendants’ conduct delayed his access to medical care that he needed for his disability, the 4 allegations fail to state a cognizable claim under the ADA or RA. 5 Plaintiff’s claims against defendants Lynch, Akins, and Newsom fail because there is no 6 respondeat superior liability under § 1983, and plaintiff’s complaint lacks allegations showing the 7 personal involvement of any of these defendants in the incident or some wrongful conduct on the 8 part of these defendants that bears a sufficient causal connection to the incident.

Felarca v. 9 Birgeneau, 891 F.3d 809, 819–20 (9th Cir. 2018) (“An official may be liable as a supervisor only 10 if either (1) he or she was personally involved in the constitutional deprivation, or (2) a sufficient 11 causal connection exists between the supervisor’s wrongful conduct and the constitutional 12 violation.”). 13 Plaintiff has also failed to state facts sufficient to impose liability on the County of 14 Sacramento. “[T]o establish municipal liability, a plaintiff must show that a ‘policy or custom’ 15 led to the plaintiff’s injury.” Castro v. County of L.A., 833 F.3d 1060, 1073 (9th Cir.

2016) (en 16 banc) (quoting Monell v. Dep’t of Soc. Servs., 436 U.S. 658, 694 (1978)); see also Endy v. County 17 of L.A., 975 F.3d 757, 769 (9th Cir. 2020); Garmon v. County of Los Angeles, 828 F.3d 837, 845 18 (9th Cir. 2016) (“[P]laintiffs who seek to impose liability on local governments under § 1983 19 must prove that action pursuant to official municipal policy caused their injury.” (citations and 20 internal quotation marks omitted)).

The complaint lacks allegations that any defendant acted 21 pursuant to a county policy. 22 This court may exercise supplemental jurisdiction over any state-law claims provided that 23 they “are so related to claims in the action within such original jurisdiction that they form part of 24 the same case or controversy under Article III of the United States Constitution.” 28 U.S.C. § 25 1367(a).

Until plaintiff states a cognizable federal claim, the court is without jurisdiction to 26 address his state law claims. 27 //// 28 //// 1 Accordingly, the complaint must be dismissed for failure to state a cognizable claim. 2 Leave to Amend 3 Plaintiff’s complaint is dismissed with leave to amend. If plaintiff chooses to file an 4 amended complaint it should observe the following: 5 Any amended complaint must identify as a defendant only persons who personally 6 participated in a substantial way in depriving him of a federal constitutional right.

Johnson v. 7 Duffy, 588 F.2d 740, 743 (9th Cir. 1978) (a person subjects another to the deprivation of a 8 constitutional right if he does an act, participates in another’s act or omits to perform an act he is 9 legally required to do that causes the alleged deprivation).

The complaint should also describe, 10 in sufficient detail, how each defendant personally violated or participated in the violation of his 11 rights. The court will not infer the existence of allegations that have not been explicitly set forth 12 in the amended complaint. 13 The amended complaint must contain a caption including the names of all defendants.

14 Fed. R. Civ. P. 10(a). 15 Plaintiff may not change the nature of this suit by alleging new, unrelated claims. See 16 *George v. Smith*, 507 F.3d 605, 607 (7th Cir. 2007). 17 Any amended complaint must be written or typed so that it so that it is complete in itself 18 without reference to any earlier filed complaint. E.D. Cal. L.R. 220. This is because an amended 19 complaint supersedes any earlier filed complaint, and once an amended complaint is filed, the 20 earlier filed complaint no longer serves any function in the case.

See *Forsyth v. Humana*, 114 21 F.3d 1467, 1474 (9th Cir. 1997) (the ““amended complaint supersedes the original, the latter 22 being treated thereafter as non-existent.””) (quoting *Loux v. Rhay*, 375 F.2d 55, 57 (9th Cir. 23 1967)). 24 Finally, the court notes that any amended complaint should be as concise as possible in 25 fulfilling the above requirements.

Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a). Plaintiff should avoid the inclusion of 26 procedural or factual background which has no bearing on his legal claims. 27 //// 28 //// 1 Conclusion 2 Accordingly, IT IS ORDERED that: 3 1. Plaintiff's application to proceed in forma pauperis (ECF No. 4) is GRANTED; 4 2. Plaintiff shall pay the statutory filing fee of \$350. All payments shall be collected in 5 accordance with the notice to the California Department of Corrections and 6 Rehabilitation filed concurrently herewith; 7 3.

Plaintiff's amended complaint (ECF No. 13) is DISMISSED with leave to amend 8 within 30 days of service of this order; and 9 4. Failure to comply with this order may result in dismissal of this action for the 10 reasons stated herein. 1] 12 | Dated: February 20, 2025 13 UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28