

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF
TENNESSEE, NASHVILLE DIVISION

Lathan Word v. Sumner County Sheriff's Department, et al.

Word · No. 3:26-cv-00002 · Decided January 6, 2026

SUMMARY

The court grants Lathan Word’s application to proceed in forma pauperis in his civil-rights action against the Sumner County Sheriff’s Department and related defendants. The court denies without prejudice Word’s motion for a preliminary injunction because he failed to establish a certain and immediate irreparable injury, relying instead on speculative concerns about future misconduct. The court notes that Word’s request for preservation of evidence is presented in a separate motion.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee, Nashville Division
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee, Nashville Division
DECIDED	January 6, 2026
DOCKET	3:26-cv-00002
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff filed a pro se civil-rights complaint and moved for leave to proceed in forma pauperis and for a preliminary injunction.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	A preliminary injunction is assessed under four factors: immediate and irreparable harm, likelihood of success on the merits, balance of the equities, and the public interest. The movant must show an injury that is certain and immediate rather than speculative or theoretical; lack of irreparable injury alone supports denial.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential

TOPICS

- injunctions
- civil rights
- police misconduct
- section 1983
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

- civil rights
- constitutional law
- civil procedure
- remedies

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Word demonstrated a sufficient likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm to warrant a preliminary injunction.
2. Whether Word's application to proceed in forma pauperis should be granted based on his alleged inability to pay the filing fee.

HOLDINGS

1. A preliminary injunction was not warranted because Word alleged only speculative future misconduct and presented no evidence of ongoing misconduct or a certain and immediate irreparable injury.
2. Word's application to proceed in forma pauperis was granted because the court determined that he lacked sufficient financial resources to pay the filing fee in advance.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“However, “a plaintiff must present the existence of an irreparable injury to get a preliminary injunction. Thus, a district court is well within its province when it denies a preliminary injunction based solely on the lack of an irreparable injury.”” (942 F.3d at 326)

“To merit a preliminary injunction, an injury must be both certain and immediate, not speculative or theoretical.” (942 F.3d at 326)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Word alleged that officers stopped him without reasonable suspicion, forcibly seized and searched him, searched his vehicle and person, issued citations, and detained him for nearly two hours. He further alleged that officers later investigated him for vehicle theft, had his vehicle towed, obtained his apartment information, and secured an arrest warrant based on a knowingly false affidavit and manipulated records. The criminal charge was dismissed and expunged, and an internal investigation later found his complaint unfounded.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Lathan Word filed a pro se complaint concerning alleged traffic-stop, search, seizure, arrest-warrant, and police-harassment conduct. The court granted Word's application to proceed in forma pauperis. It denied the motion for preliminary injunction without prejudice because Word did not show certain and immediate irreparable harm.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- D.T. v. Sumner Cnty. Schs., 942 F.3d 324, 326 (6th Cir. 2019)

OPINION

Lathan Word v. Sumner County Sheriff's Department, et al.

PER CURIAM.

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

MIDDLE DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE

NASHVILLE DIVISION

LATHAN WORD,)

) Plaintiff,)) v.) No. 3:26-cv-00002)

SUMNER COUNTY SHERIFF'S)

DEPARTMENT, et al.,)) Defendants.)

MEMORANDUM OPINION AND ORDER

Lathan Word filed a pro se complaint alleging violations of his civil rights. (Doc. No. 1). Now before the Court are Word's Application for Leave to Proceed In Forma Pauperis ("IFP Application") (Doc. No. 2) and Motion for Preliminary Injunction (Doc. No. 4).

I. FILING FEE

Based on the Court's review of the IFP Application, it appears that Word lacks sufficient financial resources from which to pay the full filing fee in advance. Therefore, his IFP Application is GRANTED. (Doc. No. 2).

II. MOTION FOR PRELIMINARY INJUNCTION

A. Background In the complaint, Word alleges that on January 4, 2025, Officer Stanfill initiated a traffic stop while Word was driving in Sumner County, Tennessee. (Doc. No. 1 at 2). Word alleges that he had not committed a traffic violation and that Officer Stanfill had no reasonable suspicion to initiate the stop. (Id.) During the stop, Word "asserted his constitutional rights." (Id.) Officer Stanfill and Officer Brawler then "violently seized [Word], slammed him onto a patrol vehicle, and handcuffed him." (Id.) The officers conducted a warrantless search of Word's vehicle but found no contraband. (Id. at 3). They then searched Word's person, forcing him to "lower his pants in freezing temperatures in public view." (Id.) Ultimately, Officer Stanfill issued unspecified citations, which Word describes as "void citations based on a non-existent statute." (Id.) (emphasis in original). In total, Word was detained for nearly two hours. (Id.) Word further alleges that on January 9, 2025, Officer Stanfill and several deputies entered the management office of his apartment building and falsely asserted that Word was in possession of a stolen vehicle. (Id.) According to Word, the officers then "illegally obtained [Word]'s apartment number, entered the residential grounds, and banged aggressively on [Word]'s door, alarming neighbors." (Id.) Also on January 9, Officer Stanfill also had Word's vehicle towed. (Id. at 3-4). Word reports that he was forced to vacate his apartment due to "repeated police harassment, false accusations, and fear of further retaliation." (Id. at 4). Word further alleges that on January 13, 2025, Officer Stanfill "obtained an arrest warrant based on a knowingly false affidavit alleging vehicle theft." (Id. at 3). To obtain the warrant, Officer Stanfill "retroactively manipulated NCIC [National Crime Information Center] records." (Id.) (emphasis in original). The charge was ultimately dismissed,

and the criminal record expunged. (Id. at 6, 8). Word complained about the officers' January 2025 conduct, and the Sumner County Sheriff's Department Office of Professional of Accountability conducted an internal investigation. (Id. at 5). On April 4, 2025, an internal affairs investigator issued a report finding the complaint unfounded. (Id. at 5–6). Word reiterates these allegations in a declaration signed under penalty of perjury. (Doc. No. 6). B. Discussion Ordinarily, Courts look to four factors in assessing whether to grant a preliminary injunction: “(1) whether the party moving for the injunction is facing immediate, irreparable harm, (2) the likelihood that the movant will succeed on the merits, (3) the balance of the equities, and (4) the public interest.” D.T. v. Sumner Cnty. Schs., 942 F.3d 324, 326 (6th Cir. 2019). However, “a plaintiff must present the existence of an irreparable injury to get a preliminary injunction. Thus, a district court is well within its province when it denies a preliminary injunction based solely on the lack of an irreparable injury.” (Id.) (citation and quotation marks omitted; emphasis in original). “To merit a preliminary injunction, an injury must be both certain and immediate, not speculative or theoretical.” (Id.) Here, Word asserts in his Motion for Preliminary Injunction that he faces “ongoing retaliation, intimidation, fabrication of evidence, abuse of law enforcement authority, and irreparable harm.” (Doc. No. 4 at 1). However, Word does not allege—let alone point to any evidence—of ongoing misconduct by any Defendant. At most, he presents speculative concerns about future unlawful activity, which are insufficient to warrant a preliminary injunction. D.T., 942 F.3d at 326. Accordingly, the Motion for Preliminary Injunction is DENIED WITHOUT PREJUDICE.! (Doc. No. 4). IT IS SO ORDERED. Wau. Eusbe. ahh Gieaslinity
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

' Word's Motion for Preliminary Injunction includes a request for an order directing the preservation of evidence. (See Doc. No. 4 at 4). However, this request is more properly presented in Word's separate Motion to Preserve Evidence (Doc. No. 3), which the Court will resolve in due course.