

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

Andrew J. Hawkins v. Chad Youker

Hawkins v. Youker · No. 3:26-cv-00433 · Decided June 17, 2026

SUMMARY

The court granted Andrew J. Hawkins leave to proceed in forma pauperis and assessed the full civil filing fee under the Prison Litigation Reform Act. On screening, the court allowed his First Amendment, RLUIPA, and Tennessee statutory claims concerning the alleged removal of religious materials to proceed against Captain Chad Youker, while dismissing claims under the Federal Tort Claims Act, Spending Clause, and Commerce Clause. The matter was referred to a magistrate judge for further proceedings.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee, Nashville Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Aleta A. Trauger
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee, Nashville Division
DECIDED	June 17, 2026
DOCKET	3:26-cv-00433
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Pro se prisoner civil-rights action screened under the Prison Litigation Reform Act after Plaintiff applied to proceed in forma pauperis.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A, the court screened the complaint for frivolousness, failure to state a claim, and claims seeking monetary relief from an immune defendant. The court construed the pro se complaint liberally and accepted its factual allegations as true unless entirely incredible.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential
PARTIES	Andrew J. Hawkins v. Chad Youker

TOPICS

prisoners rights

section 1983

first amendment

free exercise clause

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights

constitutional law

prisoner litigation

religious liberty

civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the complaint plausibly stated First Amendment free-exercise and RLUIPA claims based on an alleged jail policy prohibiting possession of physical Bibles and Alcoholics Anonymous materials.
2. Whether the complaint stated a Tennessee-law claim under Tennessee Code Annotated § 41-21-211 based on the alleged denial of access to a Bible.
3. Whether the RLUIPA claim could proceed against Captain Youker in his individual capacity for money damages.
4. Whether the complaint stated claims under the Federal Tort Claims Act, the Spending Clause, or the Commerce Clause.

HOLDINGS

1. The complaint plausibly stated a First Amendment free-exercise claim because it alleged a sincerely held religious belief and facts from which a factfinder could infer that the jail's alleged ban on physical Bibles and other religious materials impermissibly impinged religious exercise.
2. The complaint plausibly stated an RLUIPA claim based on the alleged substantial burden imposed by the jail's prohibition on physical Bibles and Alcoholics Anonymous materials.
3. The RLUIPA claim could proceed against Captain Youker in his official capacity, but any individual-capacity RLUIPA claim for money damages was dismissed.
4. The complaint plausibly stated a claim under Tennessee Code Annotated § 41-21-211 because it alleged that official jail policies denied inmates access to a Bible during nonworking hours.
5. The Federal Tort Claims Act claims were dismissed for failure to state a claim because Hawkins sued a county employee rather than the United States.
6. Any independent claims under the Spending Clause or Commerce Clause were dismissed because the complaint did not explain what claims Hawkins intended to assert under those provisions.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The allegations presently before the court permit Plaintiff’s Section 1983 and RLUIPA claims to proceed for further development of the record.”

“RLUIPA provides stronger protection for the religious liberty of incarcerated individuals than the First Amendment.”

“The court’s determination that the complaint states a colorable claim for purposes of this initial screening does not preclude the court from dismissing any claim at any time for reasons set forth in 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)

(2), nor does it preclude Defendant from filing a motion to dismiss any claim under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Andrew J. Hawkins was a pretrial detainee at the Williamson County Jail in Franklin, Tennessee. He alleged that Captain Chad Youker created and ordered implementation of policies prohibiting inmates from possessing physical Bibles and Alcoholics Anonymous materials, which the policy classified as religious texts. Hawkins alleged that removing those materials substantially burdened his religious exercise and violated the First Amendment, RLUIPA, and Tennessee's statutory requirement that inmates have access to a Bible.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Hawkins, a pretrial detainee, filed a complaint under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, RLUIPA, Tennessee Code Annotated § 41-21-211, the Federal Tort Claims Act, the Spending Clause, and the Commerce Clause. The court granted leave to proceed in forma pauperis, assessed the full filing fee under the PLRA, screened the complaint, allowed the First Amendment, RLUIPA, and Tennessee-law claims to proceed in specified capacities, and dismissed the FTCA, Spending Clause, and Commerce Clause claims.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- United States v. Smotherman, 838 F.3d 736, 739 (6th Cir. 2016)
- Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007)
- Thomas v. Eby, 481 F.3d 434, 437 (6th Cir. 2007)
- Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25, 33 (1992)
- Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520-21 (1972)
- Jourdan v. Jabe, 951 F.2d 108, 110 (6th Cir. 1991)
- McDonald v. Hall, 610 F.2d 16, 19 (1st Cir. 1979)
- Dominguez v. Corr. Med. Servs., 555 F.3d 543, 549 (6th Cir. 2009)
- Sigley v. City of Panama Heights, 437 F.3d 527, 533 (6th Cir. 2006)
- Maye v. Klee, 915 F.3d 1076, 1083 (6th Cir. 2019)
- Kent v. Johnson, 821 F.2d 1220, 1224 (6th Cir. 1987)
- O’Lone v. Estate of Shabazz, 482 U.S. 342, 349 (1987)
- Cavin v. Michigan Department of Corrections, Cavin v. Mich. Dep’t of Corr., 927 F.3d 455, 461 (6th Cir. 2019)
- Turner v. Safley, 482 U.S. 78, 89-91 (1987)
- Colvin v. Caruso, 605 F.3d 282, 296 (6th Cir. 2010)
- Lovelace v. Lee, 472 F.3d 174, 199-200 (4th Cir. 2006)

- Holt v. Hobbs, 574 U.S. 352, 361 (2015)
- Brown v. Page, No. 2:20-cv-00070, 2021 WL 288754, at *3 (M.D. Tenn. Jan. 27, 2021)
- Yates v. Painter, 306 F. App'x 778, 780 (3d Cir. 2009)
- Washington v. Klem, 497 F.3d 272, 282-83 (3d Cir. 2007)
- Alkire v. Irving, 330 F.3d 802, 810 (6th Cir. 2003)
- Haight v. Thompson, 763 F.3d 554, 569-70 (6th Cir. 2014)
- Berkovitz by Berkovitz v. United States, 486 U.S. 531, 535 (1988)

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