

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

David E. Baker, II v. Williamson County Sheriff's Office, et al.

Baker · No. 3:25-cv-00138 · Decided June 22, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee grants David E. Baker II leave to proceed in forma pauperis but finds that his § 1983 complaint does not state a viable claim. The court concludes that the allegations do not plausibly support failure-to-protect or retaliation claims against the named officials and explains that the Williamson County Sheriff's Office is not a proper § 1983 defendant. The court permits Baker 30 days to file an amended complaint.

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 22, 2026
DOCKET	3:25-cv-00138
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	A pro se incarcerated plaintiff filed a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 complaint and an application to proceed in forma pauperis. The district court granted pauper status, conducted initial screening under the Prison Litigation Reform Act, found no viable claim, and allowed the plaintiff 30 days to amend.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	On PLRA initial review, the court applied the Rule 12(b)(6) plausibility standard, accepting well-pleaded factual allegations and reasonable inferences as true, liberally construing the pro se complaint, and disregarding legal conclusions and unwarranted factual inferences.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished

TOPICS

[section 1983](#)

[prisoners rights](#)

[pleadings](#)

[motions to dismiss](#)

[civil procedure](#)

PRACTICE AREAS

prisoner civil rights

constitutional litigation

federal civil procedure

pleading and screening

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the complaint plausibly alleged that Deputy Jenkins violated Baker's constitutional rights by failing to protect him from a dangerous cellmate.
2. Whether the complaint plausibly alleged First Amendment retaliation based on Baker's PREA complaint and continued placement in segregation.
3. Whether the Williamson County Sheriff's Office was a proper defendant in a § 1983 action.
4. Whether Baker should be allowed to amend the complaint after the court found that it failed to state a viable claim.

HOLDINGS

1. The complaint did not plausibly allege a failure-to-protect claim because it did not allege that Jenkins knew of a violent history between Baker and the other inmate or knew that the other inmate had a history of sexual violence.
2. The complaint did not plausibly allege retaliation because it failed to establish an adverse action causally connected to Baker's PREA filing.
3. The Williamson County Sheriff's Office was not a proper party to a § 1983 action under the district courts' uniform treatment of police and sheriff's departments in Tennessee.
4. The court permitted Baker to file an amended complaint within 30 days to provide additional factual allegations supporting his claims.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“To plausibly claim that Deputy Jenkins violated the plaintiff’s constitutional rights by failing to protect him from being housed with such a dangerous cellmate, the plaintiff must allege that Jenkins “act[ed] intentionally in a manner that put[] the plaintiff at substantial risk of harm, without taking reasonable steps to abate that risk, and by failing to do so actually cause[d] the plaintiff’s injuries.””

“The plausibility standard ... asks for more than a sheer possibility that a defendant has acted unlawfully”

“In sum, although the Complaint as currently constituted does not assert a viable claim, the court will allow the plaintiff an opportunity to amend in order to provide additional factual allegations in support of his claims.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

While detained at the Williamson County Jail, Baker alleged that Deputy Jenkins moved him to a segregation cell with an inmate whom Baker characterized as a violent sexual predator and by whom he claimed to have previously been sexually assaulted. Baker alleged that after he filed a Prison Rape Elimination Act complaint,

Captain Youker and Lieutenant Lindquist kept him in involuntary segregation for approximately 60 days. He claimed emotional distress and sought damages and trauma counseling.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

David E. Baker filed a civil-rights complaint concerning his housing in the Williamson County Jail and sought leave to proceed in forma pauperis. The court granted the IFP application and screened the complaint under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915A and 1915(e)(2). The court concluded that the complaint failed to state a plausible failure-to-protect claim, retaliation claim, or claim against the Williamson County Sheriff's Office, but exercised its discretion to permit amendment rather than dismissing the action immediately.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Hill v. Lappin, 630 F.3d 468, 470–72, 474 (6th Cir. 2010)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678–79 (2009)
- National Rifle Association of America v. Vullo, 602 U.S. 175, 181 (2024)
- Inner City Contracting, LLC v. Charter Township of Northville, Michigan, 87 F.4th 743, 749 (6th Cir. 2023)
- Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007)
- Wurzelbacher v. Jones-Kelley, 675 F.3d 580, 583 (6th Cir. 2012)
- Carl v. Muskegon County, 763 F.3d 592, 595 (6th Cir. 2014)
- Westmoreland v. Butler County, Kentucky, 29 F.4th 721, 729 (6th Cir. 2022)
- Thaddeus-X v. Blatter, 175 F.3d 378, 394, 398 (6th Cir. 1999) (en banc)
- Hart v. Baugus, No. 3:25-cv-00905, 2026 WL 767462, at *3 (M.D. Tenn. Mar. 18, 2026)
- Herron v. Harrison, 203 F.3d 410, 416 (6th Cir. 2000)
- Dunham-Bey v. Holden, No. 98-1522, 1999 WL 1023730, at *2 (6th Cir. Nov. 5, 1999)
- Hursey v. Anderson, No. 2:15-CV-00145, 2020 WL 6204478, at *3–4 (W.D. Mich. Apr. 27, 2020), report and recommendation adopted, 2020 WL 6196282 (W.D. Mich. Oct. 22, 2020), aff'd, No. 20-2138, 2022 WL 1598142 (6th Cir. Mar. 11, 2022)
- Mathes v. Metropolitan Government of Nashville & Davidson County, No. 3:10-cv-0496, 2010 WL 3341889, at *2–3 (M.D. Tenn. Aug. 25, 2010)
- Matthews v. Jones, 35 F.3d 1046, 1049 (6th Cir. 1994)
- LaFountain v. Harry, 716 F.3d 944, 951 (6th Cir. 2013)