

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF SOUTH
DAKOTA, CENTRAL DIVISION

Dustin Brian LaRoche v. Lower Brule Sioux Tribe Corporation,
General Assistance Benefits Program

No. 3:26-CV-03007-KES · No. 3:26-CV-03007-KES · Decided May 13, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of South Dakota granted Dustin Brian LaRoche leave to proceed in forma pauperis but dismissed his complaint without prejudice under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii). LaRoche sought federal review and reversal of a Lower Brule Sioux Tribal Court decision concerning General Assistance benefit calculations. The court held that federal district courts do not sit as appellate tribunals over tribal courts and denied appointment of counsel as moot.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of South Dakota, Central Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Karen E. Schreier
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of South Dakota, Central Division
DECIDED	May 13, 2026
DOCKET	3:26-CV-03007-KES
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Pro se plaintiff filed a federal action seeking review and reversal of a Lower Brule Sioux Tribal Court dismissal and moved to proceed in forma pauperis and for appointment of counsel. The district court granted in forma pauperis status, screened the complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), dismissed the claims without prejudice for failure to state a claim, and denied appointment of counsel as moot.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	On in forma pauperis screening under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), the court assumed the truth of well-pleaded factual allegations and liberally construed the pro se complaint, while requiring specific factual allegations sufficient to state a plausible claim for relief.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown; unpublished federal district court order.

PARTIES

Dustin Brian LaRoche v. Lower Brule Sioux Tribe Corporation,
General Assistance Benefits Program

TOPICS

tribal jurisdiction appellate jurisdiction indian affairs civil procedure pleadings

PRACTICE AREAS

Federal civil procedure Tribal law Federal courts In forma pauperis proceedings

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether a federal district court may review or reverse a Lower Brule Sioux Tribal Court decision resolving a dispute over General Assistance benefits.
2. Whether the complaint stated a claim for relief under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii).
3. Whether LaRoche was entitled to proceed in forma pauperis.
4. Whether appointment of counsel was appropriate after dismissal of the complaint.

HOLDINGS

1. A federal district court lacks authority to sit as an appellate tribunal over tribal court proceedings or to correct alleged errors of law or fact in a tribal court's resolution of an underlying dispute.
2. When tribal exhaustion principles apply, tribal appellate courts must have an opportunity to review the determinations of lower tribal courts before federal adjudication proceeds.
3. The complaint failed to state a claim because it sought relief that the federal district court lacked authority to grant, and dismissal without prejudice was required under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii).
4. LaRoche qualified to proceed in forma pauperis because his financial affidavit showed that he lacked sufficient funds to pay the filing fee.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Federal district courts lack authority to review or reverse tribal court decisions and do not sit as appellate tribunals over tribal court proceedings resolving underlying disputes.”

“The appropriate forum for any such appeal lies within the Tribe’s appellate court system.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

LaRoche alleged that the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe improperly calculated his federally funded General Assistance benefits. He received \$210 per month beginning December 6, 2023, and allegedly received \$488 per month beginning March 5, 2024, after being recognized as head of household. He contended that earlier calculations were incorrect because he had been designated head of household for SNAP purposes as of October 1, 2021. The Lower Brule Sioux Tribal Court dismissed his action on September 25, 2025, and LaRoche sought federal reversal and \$834 in alleged unpaid benefits.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

LaRoche previously brought an action in Lower Brule Sioux Tribal Court challenging the calculation and administration of federally funded General Assistance benefits. The tribal court dismissed that action on September 25, 2025, citing jurisdictional concerns concerning the SNAP program. LaRoche then filed this federal action seeking reversal, federal review of the benefits determinations, and unpaid benefits. The federal district court dismissed the complaint without prejudice because it lacked authority to function as an appellate tribunal over the tribal court and because tribal appellate remedies had not been exhausted.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Lee v. McDonald's Corp., 231 F.3d 456, 459 (8th Cir. 2000)
- Williams v. McKenzie, 834 F.2d 152, 154 (8th Cir. 1987)
- Cross v. Gen. Motors Corp., 721 F.2d 1152, 1157 (8th Cir. 1983)
- Martin-Trigona v. Stewart, 691 F.2d 856, 857 (8th Cir. 1982) (per curiam)
- Key v. Does, 217 F. Supp. 3d 1006, 1007 (E.D. Ark. 2016)
- Est. of Rosenberg v. Crandell, 56 F.3d 35, 36 (8th Cir. 1995)
- Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007) (per curiam)
- Bediako v. Stein Mart, Inc., 354 F.3d 835, 839 (8th Cir. 2004)
- Martin v. Sargent, 780 F.2d 1334, 1337 (8th Cir. 1985)
- Ellis v. City of Minneapolis, 518 F. App'x 502, 504 (8th Cir. 2013) (per curiam)
- Davis v. Hall, 992 F.2d 151, 152 (8th Cir. 1993) (per curiam)
- Parker v. Porter, 221 F. App'x 481, 482 (8th Cir. 2007) (per curiam)
- Williams v. Willits, 853 F.2d 586, 588 (8th Cir. 1988)
- Bramlet v. Wilson, 495 F.2d 714, 716 (8th Cir. 1974)
- Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555-56 (2007)
- Beavers v. Lockhart, 755 F.2d 657, 663 (8th Cir. 1985)
- Abdullah v. Minnesota, 261 F. App'x 926, 927 (8th Cir. 2008) (per curiam)
- Braden v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., 588 F.3d 585, 594 (8th Cir. 2009)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009)
- Nat'l Farmers Union Ins. Cos. v. Crow Tribe of Indians, 471 U.S. 845, 856-57 (1985)
- DISH Network Serv. L.L.C. v. Laducer, 725 F.3d 877, 882-83 (8th Cir. 2013)
- Iowa Mut. Ins. Co. v. LaPlante, 480 U.S. 9, 16-19 (1987)
- Temple v. Mercier, 127 F.4th 709, 715 (8th Cir. 2025)

