

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF
MASSACHUSETTS

Steven Smith v. Chief Golden et al.

Smith v. Golden · No. 24-13182-LTS · Decided June 3, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts denies several motions filed by pro se inmate Steven Smith, including motions seeking reconsideration, sanctions, default, and summary judgment. The court concludes that Smith failed to serve Attorney Ryan Matthews within the applicable deadline and orders Smith to show cause why his claims against Matthews should not be dismissed under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 4(m).

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Leo T. Sorokin
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts
DECIDED	June 3, 2026
DOCKET	24-13182-LTS
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff's motions concerning an allegedly unserved defendant, including motions for sanctions, entry of default, and summary judgment, were before the district court while motions to dismiss remained pending.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court applied Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 4(m) and considered whether the record established timely service or good cause for failure to serve; it also reviewed requests for reconsideration under the applicable immunity principles.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unpublished district court order; generally nonprecedential.
PARTIES	Steven Smith v. Chief Golden et al.

TOPICS

- service of process
- default
- sanctions
- motion for reconsideration
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

civil rights

prisoner litigation

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Smith's motions seeking additional filings, sanctions, entry of default, or summary judgment against Attorney Matthews could be granted when Smith had not shown that Matthews was served.
2. Whether Smith's motions for reconsideration of the prior dismissal of claims against state-court judges should be granted.
3. Whether Smith should be ordered to show cause why his claims against Matthews should not be dismissed for failure to timely serve him under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 4(m).

HOLDINGS

1. Smith's motions seeking additional documents and argument, monetary sanctions, entry of default, and summary judgment against Attorney Matthews were denied because the record contained no proof that Smith had served Matthews.
2. The motions construed as requests for reconsideration were denied because Smith's arguments did not justify revisiting the prior ruling that judicial immunity shielded the named state-court judges from his claims.
3. Smith was ordered to show cause by June 23, 2026, why his claims against Attorney Matthews should not be dismissed under Rule 4(m) for failure to timely serve him.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“On this record, the absence of any responsive pleading by Attorney Matthews is attributable to Smith’s failure to serve him.” (3)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Smith sued various defendants, including attorneys and state-court judges, and proceeded without counsel. The court had previously dismissed claims against named state-court judges based on judicial immunity. Smith later attempted to pursue relief against Attorney Ryan Matthews, but the only documented service attempt failed because the address supplied to the U.S. Marshals Service was a wooded vacant lot, and the record contained no proof of later service.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Smith, a self-represented inmate proceeding in forma pauperis, initiated the action in December 2024 and filed several amended complaints. After summons issued for the third amended complaint, the court extended the service deadline and reissued summons. An attempted service on Attorney Ryan Matthews failed because the address provided was a wooded vacant lot, and Smith did not show that he subsequently served Matthews or sought another extension. The court denied Smith's pending motions and ordered him to show cause why his claims against Matthews should not be dismissed under Rule 4(m).

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Crispin-Taveras v. Mun. of Carolina, 647 F.3d 1, 6 (1st Cir. 2011)

OPINION

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS) STEVEN SMITH,)
) Plaintiff,)) v.) Civil No. 24-13182-LTS) CHIEF GOLDEN et al.)) Defendants.)) ORDER
ON PENDING MOTIONS AND TO SHOW CAUSE June 3, 2026 SOROKIN, J. On December
23, 2024, Steven Smith, an inmate at a Massachusetts correctional facility who is representing
himself and proceeding in forma pauperis, initiated this action by filing a complaint against a list
of defendants including various attorneys and state-court judges.

Doc. No. 1; see Doc. No. 31. Smith amended his complaint twice, Doc. Nos. 5, 6, and then a third
time after the Court identified deficiencies in his pleading, Doc. Nos. 23, 25. Summons issued for
the third amended complaint in October 2025, along with directions to Smith regarding his
obligation to serve the four remaining named defendants and the option to enlist the assistance of
the United States Marshals Service (“USMS”) in order to do so.

Doc. Nos. 31, 34, 37, 38. Since then, Smith has filed numerous motions, which the Court
addresses and resolves in this Order.¹ 1 Also pending are two motions to dismiss filed by three of
the four named defendants. Doc. Nos. 63, 68. Those motions are fully briefed and remain under
consideration.

The Court will resolve them separately after the show-cause deadline described later in this Order.
Three of Smith’s motions (Doc. Nos. 74, 81, and 88) express objections to the Court’s September
2025 determination that the claims Smith sought to bring against various state-court judges could
not proceed, because those defendants were shielded from such claims by the doctrine judicial
immunity.

See Doc. No. 23 at 5. The Court has reviewed those motions and construes them as requests for
reconsideration of the prior ruling dismissing Smith’s claims against the named judges. The
motions are DENIED, because none of Smith’s arguments justify revisiting or altering the Court’s
prior explanation and application of the relevant immunity principles.

To the extent the latest such motion (Doc. No. 88) proposes adding claims against a state-court
judge Smith has never named as a party to this action before, that request is also DENIED because
the same immunity principles would apply.

In another motion apparently received by this Court after some delay, Smith sought an extension of time to respond to one of the pending motions to dismiss. Doc. No. 84. Because the Court already extended the relevant deadline and has now received and docketed Smith's opposition to the motion (Doc. No. 80), the additional extension request is DENIED as moot.

The remaining motions each advance requests premised on Smith's assertion that one defendant, Attorney Ryan Matthews, has failed to timely respond to the operative complaint. The motions seek to provide additional documents and argument in support of Smith's claims against Attorney Matthews (Doc. No. 76), request monetary sanctions against Attorney Matthews for failing to file an answer (Doc.

No. 83), and seek entry of default and/or summary judgment against Attorney Matthews (Doc. Nos. 86, 87, 89).² All of these motions are DENIED ² To the extent the most recent motion suggests this Court has not appropriately updated Smith's address, Doc. No. 89, the docket demonstrates otherwise.

The Clerk shall mail a copy of the docket to Smith along with a copy of this Order. ² for the same reason: The record before the Court contains no proof that Smith has served Attorney Matthews. Under the applicable procedural rule, Smith was required to serve the defendants within ninety days of summons issuing. Fed. R. Civ. P. 4(c), (m).

The Court granted Smith a sixty-day extension of that deadline and reissued summons at his request on December 16, 2025. Doc. No. 48. That means Smith was required to effect service by February 17, 2026.³ Shortly before the deadline, a USMS Process Receipt and Return was docketed reflecting that, though an attempt was made on February 4 to serve Attorney Matthews at an address Smith provided to the USMS, the attempt failed.

Doc. No. 59. Per that document, the location identified by Smith was "a wooded vacant lot." *Id.* Soon thereafter, the Court directed the Clerk to mail to Smith copies of the USMS Process Receipts and Returns for all four defendants. Doc. Nos. 70, 71. At no point since then has Smith sought more time to serve Attorney Matthews or made any other filing indicating he has attempted to do so using a different or corrected address.

Thus, Smith's motions inviting the Court to take action against Attorney Matthews fail. On this record, the absence of any responsive pleading by Attorney Matthews is attributable to Smith's failure to serve him. More than that, Smith's failure to serve Attorney Matthews or to show good cause for this failure may be grounds to dismiss Smith's claims against Attorney Matthews.

See Fed. R. Civ. P. 4(m); *Crispin-Taveras v. Mun. of Carolina*, 647 F.3d 1, 6 (1st Cir. 2011) (affirming district court's discretion to dismiss action for failure to comply with Rule 4(m)). ³ The actual sixty-day deadline would have fallen on Saturday, February 14.

Because of that, and because Monday, February 16 was a federal holiday this year, Smith had until Tuesday, February 17 to effect service. 3 For the foregoing reasons, Smith's motions (Doc. Nos. 74, 76, 81, 83, 84, 86, 87, 88, and 89) are DENIED. Smith is hereby ORDERED to SHOW CAUSE by June 23, 2026, why his claims against Attorney Matthews should not be DISMISSED pursuant to Rule 4(m) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, where Smith has failed to timely serve Attorney Matthews.

SO ORDERED. /s/ Leo T. Sorokin United States District Judge 4