

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Morgan v. Espinoza

Morgan · No. 2:23-cv-01955-DAD-DMC (PC) · Decided August 18, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California adopted in full the magistrate judge’s findings and recommendations concerning defendants’ motion to dismiss in a prisoner civil rights action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The court dismissed with prejudice the claims against defendant Hall, denied dismissal of the claim against defendant Espinoza concerning interference with witness testimony at a disciplinary hearing, and ordered Espinoza to answer.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Dale A. Drozd
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	August 18, 2025
DOCKET	2:23-cv-01955-DAD-DMC (PC)
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff, a state prisoner proceeding under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, objected to a magistrate judge's findings and recommendations on defendants' motion to dismiss. The district court conducted de novo review, adopted the findings and recommendations in full, granted the motion as to defendant Hall, and denied it as to defendant Espinoza.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	De novo review of the magistrate judge's findings and recommendations under 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C); the motion-to-dismiss issues were evaluated under the applicable pleading standard.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential

TOPICS

- section 1983
- prisoners rights
- due process
- qualified immunity
- motions to dismiss

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether a prisoner may maintain a due process claim under § 1983 based solely on an allegedly false prison disciplinary charge.
2. Whether plaintiff sufficiently alleged that Espinoza interfered with his right to present witness testimony at a prison disciplinary hearing.
3. Whether Espinoza was entitled to dismissal on qualified-immunity grounds at the motion-to-dismiss stage.
4. Whether the magistrate judge's findings and recommendations should be adopted after de novo review.

HOLDINGS

1. A prisoner has no federally recognized constitutional right to be free from false accusations of conduct that may result in deprivation of a protected liberty interest; therefore, plaintiff's claims against Hall were dismissed with prejudice.
2. Plaintiff sufficiently alleged that Espinoza interfered with his right to present witness testimony at his prison disciplinary hearing, and Espinoza was not entitled to dismissal of that claim on qualified-immunity grounds.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“there is no federally recognized right for a prisoner to be free from false accusations” (at 2)

“falsely accusing an inmate of misconduct does not violate a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States.” (at 2)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Mike Morgan, a state prisoner, brought a § 1983 action concerning prison disciplinary proceedings. He alleged that defendant Hall issued a false disciplinary charge against him and that defendant Espinoza interfered with his ability to present witness testimony at his disciplinary hearing. The court concluded that the false-accusation claim against Hall was not constitutionally cognizable, while the allegations against Espinoza sufficiently stated a claim and did not establish entitlement to qualified-immunity dismissal at the pleading stage.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The action was referred to a magistrate judge under 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(B) and Local Rule 302. On June 6, 2025, the magistrate judge recommended granting defendants' motion to dismiss in part and denying it in part. After plaintiff objected and defendants replied, the district court conducted de novo review under 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C), adopted the recommendations, dismissed the claims against Hall with prejudice, and allowed the claim against Espinoza to proceed.

DISPOSITION

other

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

Defendant Espinoza shall file an answer to plaintiff's first amended complaint within 30 days of the order. The matter was referred back to the assigned magistrate judge for further proceedings.

CASES CITED

- Garrott v. Glebe, 600 F. App'x 540, 542 (9th Cir. 2015)
- Toscano v. Lewis, No. 12-cv-05893-EMC, 2013 WL 1632691, at *6 (N.D. Cal. Apr. 16, 2013)

OPINION

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT 9 FOR THE EASTERN
DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA 10 11 MIKE MORGAN, No. 2:23-cv-01955-DAD-DMC (PC) 12
Plaintiff, ORDER ADOPTING IN FULL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS,
GRANTING 13 v. IN PART AND DENYING IN PART DEFENDANTS' MOTION TO DISMISS
14 A. ESPINOZA, et al., (Doc. Nos. 31, 41) 15 Defendants. 16 17 Plaintiff Mike Morgan is a state
prisoner proceeding pro se and in forma pauperis in this 18 civil rights action brought pursuant to
42 U.S.C. § 1983.

The matter was referred to a United 19 States Magistrate Judge pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)
(B) and Local Rule 302. 20 On June 6, 2025, the assigned magistrate judge issued findings and
recommendations 21 recommending that defendants' motion to dismiss, (Doc. No. 31), be granted
in part and denied in 22 part. (Doc. No. 41.) Specifically, the magistrate judge concluded that as to
defendant Hall, 23 plaintiff's due process claim based upon defendant purportedly issuing a false
prison disciplinary 24 charge against plaintiff was not cognizable because prisoners do not have a
constitutional right 25 not to be wrongly accused of conduct which may result in the deprivation of
a protected liberty 26 interest.

(Id. at 5–6.) As to defendant Espinoza, the magistrate judge concluded that plaintiff had 27
sufficiently alleged that defendant had interfered with his right to present witness testimony at his
28 // 1 prison disciplinary hearing and that defendant Espinoza was not entitled to dismissal of
that claim 2 on qualified immunity grounds. (Id. at 6–9.) 3 The pending findings and
recommendations were served on the parties and contained 4 notice that any objections thereto
were to be filed within fourteen (14) days after service.

(Id. at 5 10.) On June 23, 2025, plaintiff filed objections to the findings and recommendations.
(Doc. No. 6 42.) On July 3, 2025 defendants filed a reply to plaintiff's objections in which they
confirmed 7 that they were raising no objection to the recommendation that the motion to dismiss
the claim 8 brought against defendant Espinoza be denied. (Doc. No. 43.)

On July 30, 2025, plaintiff filed 9 what was characterized as another response to defendants' motion to dismiss in which he objected 10 to the dismissal of defendant Hall from this action. (Doc. No. 44.) 11 In his objections, plaintiff argues that his claims against both defendants Hall and 12 Espinoza should be allowed to proceed. (Doc. No. 43 at 1–4.)1 In his subsequent filing plaintiff 13 mistakenly suggests that the recommendation that his claim brought against defendant Hall was 14 based upon some deficiency in how he “filled out” that claim in his submission to the court.

15 (Doc. No. 44 at 2.) In any event, none of the arguments presented by plaintiff in his objections 16 provides a basis upon which the pending findings and recommendations should be rejected. See 17 *Garrott v. Glebe*, 600 F. App'x 540, 542 (9th Cir. 2015)2 (acknowledging that there is no 18 federally recognized right for a prisoner to be free from false accusations); see also *Toscano v. 19 Lewis*, No. 12-cv-05893-EMC, 2013 WL 1632691, at *6 (N.D.

Cal. Apr. 16, 2013) (“[F]alsely 20 accusing an inmate of misconduct does not violate a right secured by the Constitution or laws of 21 the United States.”) 22 In accordance with the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C), this court has conducted a 23 de novo review of the case.

Having carefully reviewed the entire file, including plaintiff's 24 // 25 26 1 As noted by defendants, the pending findings and recommendations recommend that their motion to dismiss the claim brought by plaintiff against defendant Espinoza be denied. 27 2 Citation to this unpublished Ninth Circuit opinion is appropriate pursuant to Ninth Circuit Rule 28 36–3(b).

1 | objections, the court concludes that the findings and recommendations are supported by the 2 | record and by proper analysis. 3 Accordingly: 4 1. The findings and recommendations issued on June 6, 2025 (Doc. No. 41) are 5 ADOPTED in full; 6 2. Defendants' motion to dismiss (Doc. No. 31), is GRANTED in part and DENIED 7 in part; 8 3. Defendants' motion is granted as plaintiff's claims brought against defendant Hall, 9 those claims are dismissed with prejudice, and the Clerk of the Court is directed to 10 TERMINATE Hall as a defendant to this action; 11 4.

Defendants' motion is denied as to plaintiffs claims brought against defendant 12 Espinoza and defendant Espinoza shall file an answer to plaintiff's first amended 13 complaint within 30 days of the date of this order; and 14 5. This matter is referred back to the assigned magistrate judge for further 15 proceedings. 16 IT IS SO ORDERED. 'T | Dated: _ August 15, 2025 Da A. 2, eyel 18 DALE A. DROZD 19 UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28