

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PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential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)

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