

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF UTAH

**Bianca Vilela v. Judge Jennifer L. Valencia, Judge Ronald G. Russell,
and Jane Doe**

No. 2:26-cv-00121-RJS (D. Utah June 22, 2026) · No. 2:26-cv-00121-RJS · Decided June 22, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of Utah dismissed Bianca Vilela’s 42 U.S.C. § 1983 claims against two Utah state judges and an unnamed court clerk. The court held that declaratory and injunctive relief was unavailable because the judges were sued only in their individual capacities, and that judicial immunity barred claims for monetary damages. The court granted the defendants’ motion to dismiss and dismissed the complaint.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Utah
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Robert J. Shelby
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Utah
DECIDED	June 22, 2026
DOCKET	2:26-cv-00121-RJS
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendants moved under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6) to dismiss Vilela's complaint alleging civil-rights violations under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The court granted the motion and dismissed the complaint.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	On a Rule 12(b)(6) motion, the court accepts well-pleaded factual allegations as true, views them in the light most favorable to the plaintiff, and determines whether the complaint contains sufficient factual matter to state a facially plausible claim for relief. Conclusory allegations and legal conclusions couched as factual allegations are not accepted as true.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unknown
PARTIES	Bianca Vilela v. Judge Jennifer L. Valencia, Judge Ronald G. Russell, Jane Doe

TOPICS

section 1983 motions to dismiss civil rights civil procedure equitable relief

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights constitutional law civil procedure judicial immunity remedies

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether declaratory and injunctive relief is available in a § 1983 action against government officials sued only in their individual capacities.
2. Whether judicial immunity bars Vilela's claims for monetary damages against the state judges for issuing judicial orders and rulings.
3. Whether the judges acted outside their judicial capacity or in the complete absence of all jurisdiction so as to fall within an exception to judicial immunity.

HOLDINGS

1. A plaintiff may not obtain declaratory or injunctive relief from government officials sued only in their individual capacities; such suits permit recovery of money damages only. Because Vilela expressly sued the defendants in their individual capacities, her requests for declaratory and injunctive relief were unavailable.
2. Absolute judicial immunity bars Vilela's claims for monetary damages against the judges because the challenged conduct consisted of judicial acts performed within the subject-matter jurisdiction of the Utah state court.
3. Allegations that judges acted erroneously, maliciously, or outside required procedural frameworks do not pierce judicial immunity absent conduct outside the judicial capacity or a complete absence of subject-matter jurisdiction.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Therefore, ‘a plaintiff cannot sue an official in their individual capacity for injunctive or declaratory relief,’ and may only recover money damages in such a suit.” (Discussion Part I)

“A judge will not be deprived of immunity because the action he took was in error, was done maliciously, or was in excess of his authority; rather, he will be subject to liability only when he has acted in the ‘clear absence of all jurisdiction.’” (Discussion Part II)

“For the reasons discussed above, the Complaint fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted. The court therefore GRANTS Defendants’ Motion, and DISMISSES the Complaint.” (Conclusion)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Vilela was a defendant in a Utah state-court civil debt-collection proceeding involving Rose Lane Apartments. The state court entered a default judgment against her, later issued a continuing garnishment writ and an order to

show cause concerning vexatious-litigant status, and denied her motion to disqualify Judge Valencia. Vilela sued the two judges and an unnamed clerk under § 1983 in their individual capacities, challenging those judicial actions and seeking declaratory, injunctive, and monetary relief.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Vilela was a defendant in a Utah state-court debt-collection proceeding in which a default judgment had been entered against her. After state-court judges issued rulings involving garnishment, disqualification, and a vexatious-litigant proceeding, Vilela filed this federal § 1983 action seeking declaratory, injunctive, and monetary relief against the judges in their individual capacities. The federal court denied her motion for a temporary restraining order, and the state court proceeded with its hearing. The defendants then moved to dismiss, which the court granted.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Beedle v. Wilson, 422 F.3d 1059, 1063 (10th Cir. 2005)
- Maher v. Durango Metals, Inc., 144 F.3d 1302, 1304 (10th Cir. 1998)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009)
- Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 556, 570 (2007)
- Gallagher v. Shelton, 587 F.3d 1063, 1068 (10th Cir. 2009)
- Papasan v. Allain, 478 U.S. 265, 286 (1986)
- Strauss v. Angie's List, Inc., 951 F.3d 1263, 1267 (10th Cir. 2020)
- Ruiz v. McDonnell, 299 F.3d 1173, 1181 (10th Cir. 2002)
- Hall v. Bellmon, 935 F.2d 1106, 1110 (10th Cir. 1991)
- Kentucky v. Graham, 473 U.S. 159, 165 (1985)
- Hafer v. Melo, 502 U.S. 21, 23, 27, 31 (1991)
- Chilcoat v. San Juan County, 41 F.4th 1196, 1214 (10th Cir. 2022)
- Pride v. Does, 997 F.2d 712, 715 (10th Cir. 1993)
- Williams v. Utah Department of Corrections, 928 F.3d 1209, 1212 (10th Cir. 2019)
- Pecha v. Lake, 864 F.3d 1100, 1104 (10th Cir. 2017)
- Muscogee Nation v. Oklahoma Tax Commission, 611 F.3d 1222, 1233 (10th Cir. 2010)
- Stump v. Sparkman, 435 U.S. 349, 356-357, 362 (1978)
- Bradley v. Fisher, 80 U.S. 335, 351 (1871)
- Snell v. Tunnell, 920 F.2d 673, 686-687 (10th Cir. 1990)
- Henriksen v. Bentley, 644 F.2d 852, 855 (10th Cir. 1981)
- Stein v. Disciplinary Board of Supreme Court of New Mexico, 520 F.3d 1183, 1195 (10th Cir. 2008)
- Guttman v. Khalsa, 446 F.3d 1027, 1033 (10th Cir. 2006)

- Derringer v. Chapel, 98 Fed. App'x 728, 733 (10th Cir. 2004)
- Lerwill v. Joslin, 712 F.2d 435, 438 (10th Cir. 1983)
- Green v. Mansour, 474 U.S. 64, 68 (1985)

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