

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Trammel v. Ramos

Trammel v. Ramos · No. 2:23-cv-1111 KJM AC P · Decided June 12, 2025

SUMMARY

The court vacates its prior findings and recommendations concerning defendants’ motion to stay and orders supplemental briefing on Younger abstention and the potential application of Heck v. Humphrey. The court also denies without prejudice the plaintiff’s motion for appointment of counsel, finding no exceptional circumstances established at this stage.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	June 12, 2025
DOCKET	2:23-cv-1111 KJM AC P
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Order addressing defendants' objections to findings and recommendations concerning a motion to stay and plaintiff's motion for appointment of counsel in a prisoner civil-rights action.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Appointment of counsel is discretionary and requires consideration of the plaintiff's likelihood of success on the merits and ability to articulate claims pro se in light of the complexity of the legal issues; the plaintiff bears the burden of demonstrating exceptional circumstances.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unpublished district court order; precedential status unknown.

TOPICS

- section 1983
- civil procedure
- right to counsel

PRACTICE AREAS

- Civil procedure
- Civil rights
- Prisoner litigation

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the prior findings and recommendations concerning defendants' motion for a stay should be vacated and supplemental briefing permitted after defendants raised more fully developed Younger abstention and Heck arguments in their objections.
2. Whether plaintiff demonstrated exceptional circumstances warranting appointment of counsel in the section 1983 action.

HOLDINGS

1. The findings and recommendations issued on May 13, 2025, were vacated, and defendants were permitted to file supplemental briefing addressing whether Younger abstention applied and why the action would be barred by Heck if plaintiff were convicted in state court.
2. Plaintiff failed to demonstrate exceptional circumstances warranting appointment of counsel, and his motion was denied without prejudice.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“District courts lack authority to require counsel to represent indigent prisoners in section 1983 cases.” (at 1)

“When determining whether “exceptional circumstances” exist, the court must consider plaintiff’s likelihood of success on the merits as well as the ability of the plaintiff to articulate his claims pro se in light of the complexity of the legal issues involved.” (at 1)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff is a state prisoner proceeding pro se in a section 1983 action involving a related state criminal case. Defendants moved for a stay, and after an initial recommendation against a stay, they objected by more fully presenting Younger abstention and Heck-bar arguments and requesting judicial notice of a state preliminary-hearing transcript. Plaintiff moved for appointment of counsel based on alleged mental and physical limitations.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The magistrate judge previously recommended denying defendants' motion for a stay based on Pullman abstention and concluded that Younger abstention and defendants' cursory Heck argument did not warrant a stay. Defendants objected, raised more fully developed Younger and Heck arguments, and sought judicial notice of a state preliminary-hearing transcript. The district court vacated the findings and recommendations, authorized supplemental briefing on the stay, and denied plaintiff's motion for appointment of counsel without prejudice.

DISPOSITION

other

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

Defendants may file a supplemental brief in support of their motion to stay within twenty-one days of service of the order; plaintiff may respond within twenty-one days after service of the supplemental brief. The matter will then be submitted for decision.

CASES CITED

- Railroad Commission of Texas v. Pullman Co., 312 U.S. 496 (1941)
- Younger v. Harris, 401 U.S. 37 (1971)
- Heck v. Humphrey, 512 U.S. 477 (1994)
- Mallard v. United States Dist. Court, 490 U.S. 296, 298 (1989)
- Terrell v. Brewer, 935 F.2d 1015, 1017 (9th Cir. 1991)
- Wood v. Housewright, 900 F.2d 1332, 1335-36 (9th Cir. 1990)
- Palmer v. Valdez, 560 F.3d 965, 970 (9th Cir. 2009)

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