

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF
MISSISSIPPI, SOUTHERN DIVISION

**Nathan D. Ricklin and Megan R. Woolwine v. Nathan D. Clark, Esq.,
in his fiduciary capacity as Successor Trustee of the Crider Family
Share Trust, and Juliette H. Crider**

Ricklin · No. 1:25-cv-277-HSO-BWR · Decided June 17, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi dismissed plaintiffs’ declaratory-judgment claims concerning whether distributions to the Crider Family Share Trust constituted trust principal or income. The court held that plaintiffs had not adequately alleged diversity of citizenship, concluded alternatively that the probate exception barred the claims because the relevant trust assets remained under the custody and control of the state chancery court, and indicated that abstention would also be appropriate.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi, Southern Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Halil Suleyman Ozerden
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi, Southern Division
DECIDED	June 17, 2026
DOCKET	1:25-cv-277-HSO-BWR
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiffs filed an action for declaratory relief under 28 U.S.C. § 2201, invoking diversity jurisdiction. Defendants moved under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(1) to dismiss for lack of subject-matter jurisdiction based on inadequate allegations of diversity and the probate exception, and alternatively sought abstention. The district court granted the motions and dismissed the complaint without prejudice.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	On a Rule 12(b)(1) motion, the plaintiff bears the burden of establishing subject-matter jurisdiction. Jurisdiction may be evaluated from the complaint, the complaint supplemented by undisputed record

	facts, or the complaint supplemented by undisputed facts and the court's resolution of disputed facts. Declaratory-judgment abstention is reviewed under the discretionary Brillhart framework.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district-court memorandum opinion; nonprecedential
PARTIES	Nathan D. Ricklin, Megan R. Woolwine v. Nathan D. Clark, Esq., in his fiduciary capacity as Successor Trustee of the Crider Family Share Trust, Juliette H. Crider

TOPICS

[subject matter jurisdiction](#)
[motions to dismiss](#)
[probate procedure](#)
[trusts](#)
[civil procedure](#)

PRACTICE AREAS

[civil procedure](#)
[probate](#)
[trusts](#)
[federal jurisdiction](#)

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Plaintiffs adequately alleged complete diversity of citizenship under 28 U.S.C. § 1332.
2. Whether the probate exception to diversity jurisdiction barred Plaintiffs' declaratory claims concerning the classification and distribution of Trust assets subject to the control of the Mississippi Chancery Court.
3. Whether the requested relief would require the federal court to exercise in rem or quasi in rem jurisdiction over property in the custody of the state probate court.
4. Whether the Anti-Injunction Act potentially barred the requested relief because holding the distribution in the federal court registry could interfere with a state-court distribution order.
5. Whether the district court should abstain from exercising jurisdiction over the declaratory-judgment action under Brillhart.

HOLDINGS

1. Plaintiffs failed to establish subject-matter jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1332 because the complaint alleged only the parties' residences and did not allege their citizenship.
2. The probate exception barred Plaintiffs' first declaratory claim because the Trust assets and related distributions were in the custody and control of the Mississippi Chancery Court, and resolving the claim would require the federal court to exercise in rem jurisdiction over those assets.
3. The probate exception barred the second claim because Plaintiffs' request to place the September 5, 2025 distribution in the federal court registry would require the federal court to exercise in rem jurisdiction over property under the state court's control.
4. Even if the court had subject-matter jurisdiction and the probate exception and Anti-Injunction Act did not independently bar the claims, dismissal under the Brillhart abstention doctrine was appropriate.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The Declaratory Judgment Act is not an independent basis for subject matter jurisdiction” (II.B)

“A federal court “has no jurisdiction to probate a will or administer an estate.”” (II.C)

“If the answer to both inquiries is yes, then the probate exception precludes the federal district court from exercising diversity jurisdiction.” (II.C.1)

“But “declaratory judgments are different.”” (II.D)

““[T]he Brillhart inquiry is grounded in three fundamental concerns: federalism, fairness, and efficiency.”” (II.D.1.h)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

After L.E. Crider died in 2018, the Chancery Court of Jackson County, Mississippi, administered his estate and later created the Crider Family Share Trust through an agreed judgment. The Trust received 7,966 shares of Muskegon Energy Company stock; Juliette H. Crider was the income beneficiary, and Nathan D. Ricklin and Megan R. Woolwine were remainder beneficiaries. Muskegon made distributions to the Trust in 2024 and 2025, and the Trustee allocated them as income. Plaintiffs alleged that the distributions resulted from a partial liquidation and therefore constituted principal under Mississippi law, entitling them to the distributions.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Following the creation and administration of the Crider Family Share Trust in Mississippi state chancery proceedings, Plaintiffs filed this federal declaratory-judgment action concerning whether distributions to the Trust were principal or income. While the federal action was pending, the Trustee pursued direction regarding distributions in the Chancery Court of Jackson County, Mississippi. The federal district court dismissed without prejudice because Plaintiffs failed to adequately plead citizenship for diversity jurisdiction; alternatively, it held that the probate exception barred the claims and that Brillhart abstention was appropriate.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- In re FEMA Trailer Formaldehyde Products Liability Litigation, 668 F.3d 281, 286-287 (5th Cir. 2012)
- Elldakli v. Garland, 64 F.4th 666, 670 (5th Cir. 2023)
- MidCap Media Finance, L.L.C. v. Pathway Data, Inc., 929 F.3d 310, 313 (5th Cir. 2019)
- Getty Oil Corp. v. Insurance Co. of North America, 841 F.2d 1254, 1259 (5th Cir. 1988)
- Robertson v. Cease, 97 U.S. 646, 648 (1878)
- Bynane v. Bank of New York Mellon for CWMBS, Inc. Asset-Backed Certificates Series 2006-24, 866 F.3d 351, 356 (5th Cir. 2017)
- Navarro Savings Association v. Lee, 446 U.S. 458, 461, 464 (1980)

- Royal Canin U.S.A., Inc. v. Wulschleger, 604 U.S. 22, 37 & n.6 (2025)
- Markham, Alien Property Custodian, v. Allen et al., Markham v. Allen, 326 U.S. 490, 494 (1946)
- Curtis v. Brunsting, 704 F.3d 406, 408-410 (5th Cir. 2013)
- Vickie Lynn Marshall v. E. Pierce Marshall, Marshall v. Marshall, 547 U.S. 293, 296, 300, 311-312 (2006)
- Kinder Morgan, Inc. v. Crout, 814 F. App'x 811, 815 (5th Cir. 2020) (per curiam)
- Princess Lida of Thurn & Taxis v. Thompson, 305 U.S. 456, 466 (1939)
- Estate of Hobgood v. Pacific Life Insurance Co., No. 1:13-cv-201-HSO-RHW, 2013 WL 12209907, at *4 (S.D. Miss. Oct. 31, 2013)
- Three Keys Ltd. v. SR Utility Holdings Co., 540 F.3d 220, 228-229 (3d Cir. 2008)
- Matter of Estate of Brown, 650 F. Supp. 3d 515, 518 (S.D. Miss. 2023)
- Estate of Gordon v. Leidy, No. 3:18-cv-266-DMB-JMV, 2019 WL 3347179, at *1 (N.D. Miss. July 25, 2019)
- Ricklin-Voronstova v. Crider, No. 1:22-cv-333-TBM-RPM, 2024 WL 1336454, at *2-6 (S.D. Miss. Mar. 28, 2024)
- Matter of Crider Family Share Trust, 379 So. 3d 885, 886-890 (Miss. 2024)
- Akin v. Louisiana National Bank of Baton Rouge, 322 F.2d 749, 750-754 (5th Cir. 1963)
- Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz, PC v. Chopin, No. 22-10255, 2022 WL 4090841, at *1-2 (11th Cir. Sept. 7, 2022) (per curiam)
- Enloe v. Deutsche Bank National Trust Co., No. 4:18-cv-00603-P-BP, 2020 WL 825815, at *3, *9 (N.D. Tex. Jan. 29, 2020)
- Byers v. McAuley, 149 U.S. 608, 615 (1893)
- In re Hall's Estate, 193 So. 2d 587, 592 (Miss. 1967)
- Shaffer v. Heitner, 433 U.S. 186, 199 (1977)
- Hanson, Executrix, et al. v. Denckla et al., Hanson v. Denckla, 357 U.S. 235, 246 n.12 (1958)
- York v. Toone, No. 6:17-cv-00076, 2017 WL 7789904, at *2 (W.D. Tex. Oct. 11, 2017), report and recommendation adopted, No. 6:17-cv-76-RP, 2018 WL 3338224 (W.D. Tex. Mar. 19, 2018)
- United States v. Billingsley, 615 F.3d 404, 409 (5th Cir. 2010)
- Oracle Gas, LLC v. Beacon Supply Co., Inc., No. 2:16-cv-142-KS-MTP, 2017 WL 5653893, at *2 (S.D. Miss. Mar. 10, 2017)
- Total Plan Services, Inc. v. Texas Retailers Association, 925 F.2d 142, 145 n.1 (5th Cir. 1991)
- Colorado River Water Conservation District v. United States, 424 U.S. 800, 817 (1976)
- Wilton v. Seven Falls Co., 515 U.S. 277, 286-288 (1995)
- Orix Credit Alliance, Inc. v. Wolfe, 212 F.3d 891, 895 (5th Cir. 2000)
- Travelers Insurance Co. v. Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, Inc., 996 F.2d 774, 776 (5th Cir. 1993)
- African Methodist Episcopal Church v. Lucien, 756 F.3d 788, 797 n.29 (5th Cir. 2014)
- Koch Project Solutions, L.L.C. v. Alliance Process Partners, L.L.C., No. 21-20093, 2022 WL 16859961, at *5-7 (5th Cir. Nov. 11, 2022)
- New England Insurance Co. v. Barnett, 561 F.3d 392, 394 (5th Cir. 2009)
- Southwind Aviation, Inc. v. Bergen Aviation, Inc., 23 F.3d 948, 950 (5th Cir. 1994) (per curiam)

- *Bedivere Insurance Co. v. Pacific Van & Storage of Texas, Inc.*, No. 3:16-cv-1111-D, 2017 WL 2572775, at *8 (N.D. Tex. June 14, 2017)
- *Ironshore Specialty Insurance Co. v. Tractor Supply Co.*, 624 F. App'x 159, 166-168 (5th Cir. 2015)
- *Penn-American Insurance Co. v. Haros, L.L.C.*, No. 1:22-cv-00706, 2023 WL 2997863, at *13-14 (W.D. La. Apr. 3, 2023)
- *St. Paul Insurance Co. v. Trejo*, 39 F.3d 585, 591 n.8 (5th Cir. 1994)
- *Burgess v. Seligman*, 107 U.S. 20, 34 (1883)
- *Sheldon v. Sill*, 49 U.S. 441, 449 (1850)
- *Fire-Dex, LLC v. Admiral Insurance Co.*, 139 F.4th 519, 526-527 (6th Cir. 2025), cert. denied, 223 L. Ed. 2d 507 (Jan. 12, 2026)