

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Durrell Anthony Puckett v. Baraona, et al.

Puckett v. Baraona · No. 1:21-cv-01448-KES-BAM (PC) · Decided December 17, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California granted Plaintiff Durrell Anthony Puckett’s motions for the attendance of three incarcerated witnesses at trial in his 42 U.S.C. § 1983 action. The court found that Arlington Heyligar, Nirran Wells, and David Brinson appeared to be percipient witnesses and ordered that necessary writs of habeas corpus ad testificandum be issued.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Barbara A. McAuliffe
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	December 17, 2025
DOCKET	1:21-cv-01448-KES-BAM (PC)
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff moved for the attendance of three incarcerated witnesses at his forthcoming jury trial in a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 action. The magistrate judge granted the motions without opposition.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court applied the factors governing attendance of incarcerated witnesses and exercised its discretion in determining whether their presence would substantially further resolution of the case, considering security risks, transportation and security expense, and whether the action could be stayed until release.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown
PARTIES	Durrell Anthony Puckett v. Baraona, et al.

TOPICS

- prisoners rights
- civil rights
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the attendance of Arlington Heyligar, Nirran Wells, and David Brinson should be ordered for plaintiff's jury trial.
2. Whether the identified incarcerated witnesses appeared sufficiently likely to provide relevant firsthand testimony to justify transportation and issuance of writs of habeas corpus ad testificandum.

HOLDINGS

1. A court may order the attendance of an incarcerated witness at trial after considering whether the witness's presence will substantially further resolution of the case, the security risks, the expense of transportation and security, and whether the action could be stayed until the witness's release without prejudice.
2. The motions for attendance of Arlington Heyligar, Nirran Wells, and David Brinson at plaintiff's trial are granted.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“In determining whether to grant the motions for the attendance of incarcerated witnesses, the Court considers the following factors: (1) whether the inmate’s presence will substantially further the resolution of the case, (2) the security risks presented by the inmate’s presence, (3) the expense of transportation and security, and (4) whether the suit can be stayed until the inmate is released without prejudice to the cause asserted.” (at 1)

“The Court will issue the necessary writs of habeas corpus ad testificandum for the transportation of the incarcerated witnesses, prior to the trial in this matter.” (at 4)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff alleges that prison officials violated the Eighth Amendment during events on January 20, 2021, including through excessive force, sexual assault, and failure to protect. Plaintiff identified Arlington Heyligar, Nirran Wells, and David Brinson as incarcerated percipient witnesses to events leading up to, during, or following the incident. Each witness submitted a declaration describing relevant observations, and defendants did not oppose the requested attendance.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff, a state prisoner proceeding pro se and in forma pauperis, brought an Eighth Amendment civil-rights action against prison officials. The case was set for jury trial on claims involving excessive force, sexual assault, and failure to protect. Plaintiff filed motions seeking the attendance of three incarcerated witnesses; defendants did not oppose, and the motions were deemed submitted under Local Rule 230(l).

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Wiggins v. County of Alameda, 717 F.2d 466, 468 n.1 (9th Cir. 1983)
- Walker v. Sumner, 14 F.3d 1415, 1422 (9th Cir. 1994)
- Sandin v. Conner, 515 U.S. 472 (1995)

OPINION

Baraona

PER CURIAM.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

9 EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

10 11 DURRELL ANTHONY PUCKETT, Case No. 1:21-cv-01448-KES-BAM (PC) 12 Plaintiff,
ORDER GRANTING PLAINTIFF'S

MOTIONS FOR ATTENDANCE OF

13 v. INCARCERATED WITNESSES

14 BARAONA, et al., (ECF Nos. 142, 145, 147) 15 Defendants. 16 17 I. Introduction 18 Plaintiff
Durrell Anthony Puckett ("Plaintiff") is a state prisoner proceeding pro se and in 19 forma
pauperis in this civil rights action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. This case is set for a jury 20 trial
before District Judge Kirk E. Sherriff on March 10, 2026, on Plaintiff's claims against: (1) 21
Defendants Baraona, Burnitzki, Leos, Hernandez, and Diaz for excessive force in violation of the
22 Eighth Amendment; (2) Defendant Leos for sexual assault in violation of the Eighth
Amendment; 23 and (3) Defendants A. Ruiz, E. Ruiz, Meier, Gutierrez, Allison (Cronister), and
Price for failure 24 to protect in violation of the Eighth Amendment. 25 Pursuant to the Court's
May 16, 2025 Second Scheduling Order, (ECF No. 135), and as 26 discussed in the Court's
November 21, 2025 order, (ECF No. 148), Plaintiff's motions for 27 attendance of incarcerated
witnesses are currently before the Court. (ECF Nos. 142, 145, 147.) 28 Defendants did not file a
motion for attendance of any incarcerated witnesses. No opposition has 1 been filed, and the
deadline to do so has expired. (ECF Nos. 135, 148.) Plaintiff's motions for 2 attendance of
incarcerated witnesses are therefore deemed submitted. Local Rule 230(l). 3 II. Incarcerated
Witnesses 4 In determining whether to grant the motions for the attendance of incarcerated
witnesses, 5 the Court considers the following factors: (1) whether the inmate's presence will
substantially 6 further the resolution of the case, (2) the security risks presented by the inmate's
presence, (3) the 7 expense of transportation and security, and (4) whether the suit can be stayed
until the inmate is 8 released without prejudice to the cause asserted. Wiggins v. County of
Alameda, 717 F.2d 466, 9 468 n.1 (9th Cir. 1983); see also Walker v. Sumner, 14 F.3d 1415, 1422

(9th Cir. 1994) (district 10 court did not abuse its discretion when it concluded the inconvenience and expense of 11 transporting inmate witness outweighed any benefit he could provide where the importance of the 12 witness's testimony could not be determined), abrogated on other grounds by *Sandin v. Conner*, 13 515 U.S. 472 (1995). 14 A. Inmate Arlington Heyligar 15 Plaintiff requests the attendance of Inmate Arlington Heyligar (CDCR #G-41610) at trial. 16 (ECF No. 142.) Plaintiff states that Inmate Heyligar saw the majority of the incident in detail, has 17 firsthand knowledge, knows what happened based on eye witness observation, and when she1 last 18 encountered Plaintiff she said she would testify willingly. (Id. at 2.) Plaintiff also attaches a 19 declaration, signed by Inmate Heyligar under penalty of perjury, setting forth her observations of 20 events that occurred on January 19 and January 20, 2021. (Id. at 4.) 21 In light of Defendants' lack of opposition to Plaintiff's motion, and upon review of Inmate 22 Heyligar's declaration, it appears that Inmate Heyligar was a percipient witness to events leading 23 up to and following the January 20, 2021 events at issue in this action. Plaintiff's request for 24 attendance of Inmate Heyligar at trial is therefore granted. 25 /// 26 B. Inmate Nirran Wells 27 1 Plaintiff refers to Inmate Heyligar as both "he" and "she" throughout his motion. (See ECF No. 142, p. 2.) The Court here will refer to Inmate Heyligar using feminine pronouns, but Plaintiff is encouraged to correct the Court if 28 Plaintiff is aware that Inmate Heyligar uses masculine pronouns. 1 Plaintiff requests the attendance of Inmate Nirran Wells (CDCR #AS-7049) at trial. (ECF 2 No. 142.) Plaintiff states that Inmate Wells heard what transpired, why, their motives, and that it 3 was retaliation and pre-meditated as Plaintiff has stated. (Id. at 3.) Plaintiff also attaches a 4 declaration, signed by Inmate Wells under penalty of perjury, setting forth her observations of 5 events that occurred on January 20, 2021. (Id. at 6.) 6 In light of Defendants' lack of opposition to Plaintiff's motion, and upon review of Inmate 7 Wells' declaration, it appears that Inmate Wells was a percipient witness to events leading up to 8 and following the January 20, 2021 events at issue in this action. Plaintiff's request for 9 attendance of Inmate Wells at trial is therefore granted. 10 C. Inmate David Brinson 11 Plaintiff requests the attendance of Inmate David Brinson (CDCR #J-09563) at trial. 12 (ECF No. 145, 147.) While Plaintiff initially requested the presence of Inmate Brinson without 13 including Inmate Brinson's full name or CDCR number, (ECF No. 145), Plaintiff later filed a 14 supplement with Inmate Brinson's full information, (ECF No. 147). Plaintiff states that Inmate 15 Brinson has knowledge of Plaintiff's injuries, saw Defendant Hernandez hit Plaintiff, saw 16 Defendant Leos grinding on Plaintiff, saw other staff just standing there, and told Plaintiff he 17 remembered the incident and will testify. (ECF No. 145.) Plaintiff also attaches a declaration, 18 signed by Inmate Brinson under penalty of perjury, setting forth his observations of the events at 19 issue in this action and his willingness to testify. (ECF No. 147, pp. 3-4.) 20 In light of Defendants' lack of opposition to Plaintiff's motion, and upon review of Inmate 21 Brinson's declaration, it appears that Inmate Brinson was a percipient witness to the January 20, 22 2021 events at issue in this action. Plaintiff's request for attendance of Inmate Brinson at trial is 23 therefore granted. 24 III. Order 25 Based on the foregoing, IT IS HEREBY

ORDERED as follows: 26 1. Plaintiff's motions for attendance of incarcerated witnesses at trial, (ECF Nos. 142, 145, 27 147), are GRANTED, with respect to the following witnesses: 28 a. Inmate Arlington Heyligar (CDCR #G-41610); 1 b. Nirran Wells (CDCR #AS-7049); and 2 c. David Brinson (CDCR #J-09563); and 3 2. The Court will issue the necessary writs of habeas corpus ad testificandum for the 4 transportation of the incarcerated witnesses, prior to the trial in this matter. 5 IT IS SO ORDERED. 6 7 Dated: December 17, 2025 /s/ Barbara A. McAuliffe _ UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

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