

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Stephenson v. Clendenin

Case No. 2:22-cv-1521-DAD-JDP (P) (E.D. Cal. Dec. 3, 2025) · No. 2:22-cv-1521-DAD-JDP (P) · Decided
December 3, 2025

SUMMARY

This document contains findings and recommendations in a civil-rights action brought by civil detainees at Coalinga State Hospital against Department of State Hospitals officials. The magistrate judge recommends granting in part and denying in part defendants’ motion to dismiss, including dismissal of the Eighth Amendment claims, certain Fourteenth Amendment claims concerning sex-offender treatment and internet-capable devices, and dismissal with leave to amend of one First Amendment religious-services claim. Claims concerning educational programming, phone calls, personal clothing, nutritional supplements, and related conditions of confinement are recommended to proceed, while official-capacity damages claims are barred by the Eleventh Amendment.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Jeremy D. Peterson
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	December 3, 2025
DOCKET	2:22-cv-1521-DAD-JDP (P)
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiffs brought a consolidated civil-rights action concerning conditions of confinement and moved against defendants' Rule 12(b)(6) motion to dismiss. The magistrate judge issued findings and recommendations recommending that the motion be granted in part and denied in part.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	On a Rule 12(b)(6) motion, the court considers whether the complaint states a facially plausible claim for relief, generally accepts well-pleaded factual allegations as true, construes them in the nonmoving party's favor, and considers the pleadings, attached exhibits, and matters subject to judicial notice. Qualified immunity may support dismissal at the pleading stage only when its applicability is apparent from the complaint itself.

PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential
PARTIES	William Stephenson, Thomas Bodnar, Joshua Forster v. Stephanie Clendenin, Brandon Brice

TOPICS

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether civil detainees may pursue conditions-of-confinement claims under the Eighth Amendment rather than the Fourteenth Amendment.
2. Whether Bodnar and Forster stated a Fourteenth Amendment claim based on inadequate sex-offender treatment while awaiting SVP adjudication.
3. Whether plaintiffs stated a Fourteenth Amendment claim based on restrictions on internet-capable electronic devices.
4. Whether plaintiffs stated Fourteenth Amendment claims based on unequal access to educational programming, free telephone calls, personal clothing, nutritional supplements, and food purchases compared with criminal counterparts.
5. Whether Bodnar stated a First Amendment religious-exercise claim and should receive leave to amend.
6. Whether defendants were entitled to qualified immunity at the motion-to-dismiss stage.
7. Whether the Eleventh Amendment barred official-capacity damages claims while permitting prospective injunctive relief.

HOLDINGS

1. The Eighth Amendment does not govern civil detainees' challenges to their conditions of confinement; such claims arise under the Fourteenth Amendment. The Eighth Amendment claims should therefore be dismissed without leave to amend.
2. Bodnar and Forster failed to state a Fourteenth Amendment claim based on denial of sex-offender treatment while awaiting SVP adjudication because California law does not mandate such treatment before a person is adjudicated an SVP. The claim should be dismissed without leave to amend.
3. Plaintiffs adequately alleged that denying them access to internet-capable electronic devices was presumptively punitive because criminal counterparts and certain released individuals allegedly received more individualized access. Defendants nevertheless rebutted the presumption by identifying legitimate, nonpunitive security and facility-management interests, so the claim should be dismissed without leave to amend.

4. Plaintiffs sufficiently alleged that these restrictions were more restrictive than conditions imposed on criminal counterparts and therefore presumptively punitive. Defendants did not identify legitimate, nonpunitive interests rebutting the presumption at the pleading stage, so dismissal should be denied.
5. Bodnar failed to allege sufficient facts comparing his access to Protestant services with the access available to criminal counterparts, but the deficiency could be cured by amendment. The claim should be dismissed with leave to amend.
6. Qualified immunity should not support dismissal of the Fourteenth Amendment conditions-of-confinement claims that adequately alleged a violation of clearly established rights. The issue was premature as to Bodnar's First Amendment claim because that claim was being dismissed with leave to amend.
7. The Eleventh Amendment bars plaintiffs' claims for monetary damages against defendants in their official capacities, but does not bar their claims for prospective injunctive relief under *Ex parte Young*.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The Fourteenth Amendment, not the Eighth Amendment, governs civil detainees’ challenges against the conditions of their confinement.” (at 7)

“an individual detained under civil process . . . cannot be subjected to conditions that amount to punishment.” (at 7-8)

“they are entitled to more considerate treatment and conditions of confinement than criminals whose conditions of confinement are designed to punish.” (at 8)

“legitimate, non-punitive interests” (at 9)

“Determining claims of qualified immunity at the motion-to-dismiss stage raises special problems for legal decision making.” (at 15)

“the state official sued ‘must have some connection with the enforcement of the act’” (at 16)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiffs were civil detainees held at Coalinga State Hospital under California's Sexually Violent Predator Act. Bodnar and Forster were awaiting treatment or adjudication of their SVP petitions, while Stephenson had been adjudicated an SVP and was awaiting conditional release. They alleged inadequate sex-offender treatment and more restrictive access than criminal counterparts to internet-capable devices, educational and vocational programming, personal clothing, nutritional supplements, and free telephone calls; Bodnar also alleged denial of Protestant religious services while Catholic and Native American services were available.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiffs, civil detainees held at Coalinga State Hospital, alleged violations of the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments and, as to Bodnar, the First Amendment. Defendants moved to dismiss under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6). The magistrate judge recommended dismissal of the Eighth Amendment claims, the pre-adjudication treatment claim, the internet-device claim, Bodnar's religious-services claim with leave to amend,

and official-capacity damages claims, while recommending that other Fourteenth Amendment conditions-of-confinement claims proceed.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 556, 570 (2007)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009)
- Chubb Custom Insurance Co. v. Space Systems/Loral, Inc., 710 F.3d 946, 956 (9th Cir. 2013)
- Akhtar v. Mesa, 698 F.3d 1202, 1212 (9th Cir. 2012)
- Franklin v. Murphy, 745 F.2d 1221, 1228-29 (9th Cir. 1984)
- Jones v. Blanas, 393 F.3d 918, 923, 931-35 (9th Cir. 2004)
- King v. County of Los Angeles, 885 F.3d 548, 556-58 (9th Cir. 2018)
- Hubbart v. Superior Court, 19 Cal. 4th 1138, 1171 (1999)
- Kitchens v. Pierce, 584 F. App'x 302, 304 (9th Cir. 2014)
- Batten v. Shasta County Board of Supervisors, 489 F. App'x 174, 175 (9th Cir. 2012)
- People v. Ciancio, 134 Cal. Rptr. 2d 531, 545-46 (Cal. Ct. App. 2003)
- Batten v. Shasta County Jail, No. CIV S-08-2511 LKK EFB, 2011 WL 3875706, at *1, *11-*12 (E.D. Cal. Sept. 11, 2011)
- Fletcher v. Clendenin, No. 22-cv-00249-AWI-BAM, 2022 WL 2791480, at *5-*6 (E.D. Cal. July 15, 2022)
- Fletcher v. Clendenin, No. 22-cv-00249-AWI-BAM, 2022 WL 4226209 (E.D. Cal. Sept. 12, 2022)
- Fletcher v. Clendenin, No. 22-cv-00249-AWI-BAM, 2024 WL 5247103 (E.D. Cal. Dec. 30, 2024)
- Johanneck v. Ahlin, No. 18-cv-00051-LJO-MJS, 2018 WL 1014454 (E.D. Cal. Feb. 21, 2018)
- Keates v. Koile, 883 F.3d 1228, 1234-35 (9th Cir. 2018)
- O'Brien v. Welty, 818 F.3d 920, 936 (9th Cir. 2016)
- Tarabochia v. Adkins, 766 F.3d 1115, 1121 (9th Cir. 2014)
- Chappell v. Mandeville, 706 F.3d 1052, 1058 (9th Cir. 2013)
- Kentucky v. Graham, 473 U.S. 159, 166 (1985)
- Flint v. Dennison, 488 F.3d 816, 824-25 (9th Cir. 2007)
- Bair v. Krug, 853 F.2d 672, 675 (9th Cir. 1988)
- Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action v. Brown, 674 F.3d 1128, 1134 (9th Cir. 2012)
- Weinapple v. Bonta, No. 24-cv-1769-DAD-JDP, 2024 WL 5118224, at *2 (E.D. Cal. Dec. 16, 2024)
- Culinary Workers Union, Local 226 v. Del Papa, 200 F.3d 614, 619 (9th Cir. 1999) (per curiam)
- L.A. County Bar Ass'n v. Eu, 979 F.2d 697, 704 (9th Cir. 1992)
- United States v. Washington, 759 F.2d 1353, 1357 (9th Cir. 1985)
- Turner v. Duncan, 158 F.3d 449, 455 (9th Cir. 1998)

- *Martinez v. Yist*, 951 F.2d 1153 (9th Cir. 1991)

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