

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Steven Wayne Bonilla v. Napa County Superior Court and Its Clerk’s
Office; Court Clerks; John Doe 1-1000

Bonilla v. Napa County Superior Court, No. 25-cv-01607-AJB-LR (S.D. Cal. Aug. 4, 2025) · No. 25-cv-01607-AJB-LR · Decided August 4, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Southern District of California dismissed Steven Wayne Bonilla’s 42 U.S.C. § 1983 action for failure to pay the required filing fee or properly seek in forma pauperis status. The court also determined that Bonilla was barred from proceeding in forma pauperis under the Prison Litigation Reform Act’s three-strikes provision and found no applicable imminent-danger exception.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Southern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Anthony J. Battaglia
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Southern District of California
DECIDED	August 4, 2025
DOCKET	25-cv-01607-AJB-LR
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff, an incarcerated pro se litigant, filed a civil-rights complaint under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 without paying the filing fee or filing a properly supported motion to proceed in forma pauperis. The district court dismissed the action and directed entry of final judgment.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviewed the filing-fee and IFP requirements under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1914 and 1915, including whether the complaint plausibly alleged imminent danger under § 1915(g).
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unpublished federal district court order; precedential status unknown
PARTIES	Steven Wayne Bonilla v. Napa County Superior Court and Its Clerk’s Office, Court Clerks, John Doe 1-1000

TOPICS

civil procedure

prisoners rights

civil rights

section 1983

PRACTICE AREAS

Civil procedure

Prisoner civil rights

In forma pauperis litigation

Federal courts

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the civil action could proceed when the plaintiff had neither paid the filing fee nor filed a properly supported motion to proceed in forma pauperis.
2. Whether the plaintiff was barred from proceeding in forma pauperis under the Prison Litigation Reform Act's three-strikes provision, 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).
3. Whether the plaintiff plausibly alleged that he was under imminent danger of serious physical injury so as to qualify for the exception to § 1915(g).

HOLDINGS

1. A civil action cannot proceed when the plaintiff has not paid the filing fee and has not obtained permission to proceed in forma pauperis through a properly supported application.
2. A prisoner who has accumulated three or more qualifying dismissals may not proceed in forma pauperis in a subsequent civil action unless the prisoner satisfies the imminent-danger exception.
3. Bonilla did not qualify for the imminent-danger exception because his complaint did not plausibly allege that he faced imminent danger of serious physical injury when he filed the action.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Pursuant to § 1915(g), a prisoner with three strikes or more cannot proceed IFP.” (at 3)

“Accordingly, because Plaintiff has, while incarcerated, accumulated far more than the three strikes permitted by Section 1915(g), and he fails to make any plausible allegation that he faced imminent danger of serious physical injury at the time he filed this case, he is not entitled to the privilege of proceeding IFP.” (at 5)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Steven Wayne Bonilla was incarcerated at California Medical Facility when he filed a § 1983 complaint. He alleged that he had been arrested based on a fraudulent arrest-warrant affidavit and was the victim of a conspiratorial and discriminatory Alameda County criminal prosecution, but he sued the Napa County Superior Court and related defendants for refusing to void the conviction. Bonilla did not pay the required \$405 filing and administrative fee and did not file a properly supported motion to proceed in forma pauperis. The court found that his litigation history included far more than three qualifying dismissals and that his allegations did not show imminent danger of serious physical injury.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Bonilla filed a § 1983 complaint against the Napa County Superior Court, its clerk's office, court clerks, and Doe defendants. He neither paid the \$405 civil filing and administrative fee nor submitted a properly supported IFP motion. The court determined that proceeding IFP would also be futile because Bonilla had accumulated more than three qualifying PLRA strikes and had not plausibly alleged imminent danger of serious physical injury. The court dismissed the action, ordered final judgment, closed the file, and certified that an appeal would not be taken in good faith.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Andrews v. Cervantes, 493 F.3d 1047, 1051-52, 1055 (9th Cir. 2007)
- Hymas v. U.S. Dep't of the Interior, 73 F.4th 763, 765, 767 (9th Cir. 2023)
- Escobedo v. Applebees, 787 F.3d 1226, 1234 (9th Cir. 2015)
- Andrews v. King, 398 F.3d 1113, 1116 n.1, 1119-20 (9th Cir. 2005)
- Moore v. Maricopa Cnty. Sheriff's Office, 657 F.3d 890, 892 (9th Cir. 2011)
- Bruce v. Samuels, 577 U.S. 82, 85 (2016)
- Williams v. Paramo, 775 F.3d 1182, 1185 (9th Cir. 2015)
- Washington v. L.A. Cnty. Sheriff's Dep't, 833 F.3d 1048, 1054 (9th Cir. 2016)
- Tierney v. Kupers, 128 F.3d 1310, 1312 (9th Cir. 1997)
- O'Neal v. Price, 531 F.3d 1146, 1153 (9th Cir. 2008)
- El-Shaddai v. Zamora, 833 F.3d 1036, 1042 (9th Cir. 2016)
- Ray v. Lara, 31 F.4th 692, 701 (9th Cir. 2022)
- In re Steven Bonilla, 2012 WL 216401, at *1, *3 (N.D. Cal. Jan. 24, 2012)
- Rodriguez v. Cook, 169 F.3d 1176, 1180 (9th Cir. 1999)
- Coleman v. Tollefson, 575 U.S. 532, 534 (2015)
- Franklin v. Murphy, 745 F.2d 1221, 1231 (9th Cir. 1984)
- Kim v. Allison, 87 F.4th 994, 998 n.3 (9th Cir. 2023)
- United States ex rel. Robinson Rancheria Citizens Council v. Borneo, Inc., 971 F.2d 244, 248 (9th Cir. 1992)
- Lee v. City of L.A., 250 F.3d 668, 689 (9th Cir. 2001)