

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE CENTRAL DISTRICT OF
ILLINOIS, ROCK ISLAND DIVISION

Jeremiah Bradfield, individually and as representative of the Estate
of Eddie James Bradfield v. OSF St. Mary Medical Center, Galesburg
Hospital Ambulance Service, Galesburg Fire Department, John Doe
EMT #1, John Doe EMT #2, John Doe EMT #3, and John/Jane Does
1-10

Bradfield · No. 4:26-cv-04103-SLD-RLH · Decided May 5, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Central District of Illinois grants Jeremiah Bradfield leave to proceed in forma pauperis in an action arising from Eddie James Bradfield’s death. The court dismisses the Illinois Survival Act count as not creating an independent cause of action and addresses the requirement that estate and wrongful-death claims be brought by counsel when multiple beneficiaries or next of kin are involved. Plaintiff is ordered to identify whether the decedent died intestate and to identify the relevant beneficiaries and next of kin.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Central District of Illinois, Rock Island Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Sara Darrow
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Central District of Illinois, Rock Island Division
DECIDED	May 5, 2026
DOCKET	4:26-cv-04103-SLD-RLH
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff filed a civil action and moved to proceed in forma pauperis. The district court screened the complaint and ruled on the IFP motion.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court screened the complaint in connection with the application to proceed in forma pauperis; no separate appellate standard of review was stated.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unknown

TOPICS

civil procedure

probate procedure

estate litigation

section 1983

health law

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

civil rights

probate

health law

torts

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Plaintiff demonstrated eligibility to proceed in forma pauperis.
2. Whether the Illinois Survival Act creates an independent cause of action.
3. Whether a pro se plaintiff may litigate claims belonging to a decedent's estate when the plaintiff is not the estate's sole beneficiary.
4. Whether a pro se plaintiff may bring an Illinois Wrongful Death Act claim that represents the interests of multiple surviving beneficiaries or next of kin.
5. What information Plaintiff must provide concerning the decedent's will, estate beneficiaries, and next of kin before the action may proceed.

HOLDINGS

1. Plaintiff may proceed in forma pauperis because his sworn affidavit demonstrated that he was unable to pay the costs of the proceeding.
2. The Illinois Survival Act does not create an independent cause of action; it permits a representative of a decedent to maintain statutory or common-law actions that accrued before death.
3. A pro se plaintiff may not represent an estate in court unless he is the estate's only beneficiary.
4. A plaintiff bringing an Illinois Wrongful Death Act claim represents the interests of the surviving spouse and next of kin and therefore cannot proceed pro se when the claim involves interests of persons other than the plaintiff, absent circumstances such as the plaintiff being the sole next of kin.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“It ‘allows a representative of the decedent to maintain those statutory or common-law actions that had already accrued to the decedent before he or she died.’” (at 2)

“However, any surviving claims belong to Decedent’s estate. And a pro se plaintiff—that is, a person without a lawyer—cannot represent an estate in court unless he is the only beneficiary of the estate.” (at 2–3)

“Because a plaintiff bringing a Wrongful Death Act claim represents the interests of the surviving spouse and next of kin, he cannot bring the claim pro se, presumably unless he is the sole next of kin.” (at 3)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff alleged claims arising from Eddie James Bradfield's death on December 5, 2025, including constitutional, federal statutory, Illinois wrongful-death, medical-malpractice, and Survival Act claims. Plaintiff alleged that he was the court-appointed representative of the decedent's estate. Documents attached to the

complaint indicated that Plaintiff and the decedent's brother had authority to represent the estate and that the decedent's mother was his closest next of kin, suggesting that Plaintiff was not the estate's sole beneficiary or the decedent's sole next of kin.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Jeremiah Bradfield sued the medical center, ambulance service, fire department, unidentified emergency medical personnel, and unidentified defendants concerning the death of Eddie James Bradfield. The district court granted leave to proceed in forma pauperis, dismissed the Illinois Survival Act count because the Act does not create an independent cause of action, and directed Plaintiff to provide information concerning the decedent's will, estate beneficiaries, and next of kin before proceeding further.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Moon v. Rhode, 67 N.E.3d 220, 226 (Ill. 2016)
- Bennett v. Tucker, 827 F.2d 63, 67–68 (7th Cir. 1987)
- Malone v. Nielson, 474 F.3d 934, 937 (7th Cir. 2007)
- Rodgers v. Cook County, 998 N.E.2d 164, 172 (Ill. App. Ct. 2013)
- In re IFC Credit Corp., 663 F.3d 315, 318 (7th Cir. 2011)
- In re Estate of Finley, 601 N.E.2d 699, 701 (Ill. App. Ct. 1992)