

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF
ILLINOIS

Antonio Hunter v. Stephen Ritz

Hunter · No. 3:21-CV-271-NJR · Decided April 10, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Southern District of Illinois denied Defendant Stephen Ritz’s Renewed Motion for Judgment as a Matter of Law and Motion for New Trial following a jury verdict awarding Antonio Hunter \$4 million in compensatory damages and \$1 million in punitive damages. The court held that sufficient evidence supported the deliberate-indifference and punitive-damages findings and rejected Ritz’s asserted trial errors, including evidentiary and limiting-instruction issues.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Southern District of Illinois
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Nancy J. Rosenstengel
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Southern District of Illinois
DECIDED	April 10, 2026
DOCKET	3:21-CV-271-NJR
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	After a jury found for Plaintiff Antonio Hunter and awarded compensatory and punitive damages, Defendant Stephen Ritz moved for judgment as a matter of law under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 50(b) and for a new trial under Rule 59.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Judgment as a matter of law is proper only when a reasonable jury would lack a legally sufficient evidentiary basis to find for the prevailing party. A new trial is appropriate when the verdict is against the manifest weight of the evidence or the trial was unfair, and a verdict should be overturned only when no rational jury could have reached it. Alleged trial errors are assessed for prejudice, including whether there was a reasonable possibility that improper material affected the verdict; cumulative-error relief requires a fundamentally unfair trial.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown

TOPICS

motion for new trial

motion for directed verdict

evidence

prisoners rights

civil rights

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

civil rights

prisoner medical care

evidence

remedies

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Ritz's renewed motion for judgment as a matter of law was procedurally proper under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 50(b), including whether the written preverdict motion supplemented the oral Rule 50(a) motion.
2. Whether sufficient evidence supported the jury's finding of deliberate indifference to Hunter's serious medical needs.
3. Whether sufficient evidence supported the jury's punitive-damages award.
4. Whether alleged errors involving a limiting instruction, evidence of a prior settlement, a reference to a previous trial, and their cumulative effect warranted a new trial under Rule 59.

HOLDINGS

1. The current motion was a proper renewed motion under Rule 50(b) because Ritz made an oral Rule 50(a) motion before the case was submitted to the jury and later supplemented it with a written motion.
2. The evidence was sufficient for a reasonable jury to find that Ritz was deliberately indifferent to Hunter's serious medical needs.
3. The evidence was sufficient for a reasonable jury to award punitive damages, and Ritz presented no new argument requiring reconsideration of the court's prior analysis.
4. The alleged errors did not warrant a new trial because Ritz failed to show preserved, prejudicial error or a fundamentally unfair trial.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"That makes Dr. Ritz's current motion his renewed motion under Rule 50(b)." (I. Renewed Motion for Judgment as a Matter of Law)

"Thus, Dr. Ritz has failed to demonstrate that any cumulative errors deprived him of a fair trial." (II. Motion for New Trial)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Hunter, a former Illinois Department of Corrections inmate, had a history of rectal prolapse surgically corrected in 2012. In 2018 and 2019, he experienced symptoms including bleeding, difficulty emptying his bowels, and fecal incontinence, and Dr. Myers referred him for a surgical consultation. Dr. Ritz received a 2019 email and

letter describing the recurrence of Hunter's symptoms and providing medical records he had previously requested, but admitted that he took no action in response. A jury found that Ritz was deliberately indifferent and awarded compensatory and punitive damages.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Hunter sued Dr. Ritz for deliberate indifference to serious medical needs in violation of the Eighth Amendment. A 2024 jury trial ended in a mistrial after the jury hung. At a second trial in June 2025, the jury found for Hunter and awarded \$4 million in compensatory damages and \$1 million in punitive damages. Ritz then filed a renewed motion for judgment as a matter of law and a motion for new trial, both of which the court denied.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Passananti v. Cook County, 689 F.3d 655, 659 (7th Cir. 2012)
- Martinez v. City of Chicago, 900 F.3d 838, 844 (7th Cir. 2018)
- Hakim v. Safariland, LLC, 79 F.4th 861, 868 (7th Cir. 2023)
- Whitehead v. Bond, 680 F.3d 919, 928 (7th Cir. 2012)
- Clarett v. Roberts, 657 F.3d 664, 674 (7th Cir. 2011)
- United States v. Coney, 76 F.4th 602, 607 (7th Cir. 2023)
- United States v. Sababu, 891 F.2d 1308, 1333 (7th Cir. 1989)
- Christmas v. City of Chicago, 682 F.3d 632, 639-41, 643 (7th Cir. 2012)
- United States v. Jones, 455 F.3d 800, 811-12 (7th Cir. 2006)
- Crothersville Lighthouse Tabernacle Church, Inc. v. Church Mutual Insurance Co., S.I., 168 F.4th 483, 489 (7th Cir. 2026)
- United States v. Powell, 652 F.3d 702, 706 (7th Cir. 2011)
- United States v. Allen, 269 F.3d 842, 847 (7th Cir. 2001)