

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF INDIANA, SOUTH BEND DIVISION

Callie Burke v. Matthew Brown

Burke · No. 3:25-CV-286-CCB-AZ · Decided December 19, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana considers a motion to dismiss Callie Burke’s constitutional claims arising from her termination by the Indiana Department of Corrections. The court holds that the Rooker-Feldman doctrine does not apply because the state-court decision was neither final nor on the merits. The court denies the motion to dismiss without prejudice and stays the federal case pending resolution of Burke’s state-court appeal under the Pullman abstention doctrine.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana, South Bend Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Cristal C. Brisco
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana, South Bend Division
DECIDED	December 19, 2025
DOCKET	3:25-CV-286-CCB-AZ
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendant moved to dismiss Plaintiff's amended federal complaint under the Rooker-Feldman doctrine. Plaintiff opposed dismissal and requested a stay under the Pullman abstention doctrine pending resolution of her appeal from an Indiana state-court decision.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court evaluated the motion to dismiss under the jurisdictional requirements of the Rooker-Feldman doctrine and considered whether Pullman abstention warranted a stay.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district-court opinion

TOPICS

- motions to dismiss
- civil procedure
- subject matter jurisdiction
- comity
- federalism

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

constitutional law

civil rights

administrative law

employment law

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the Rooker-Feldman doctrine barred federal jurisdiction because Burke had previously pursued related claims in Indiana state court.
2. Whether the federal action should be stayed under the Pullman abstention doctrine while Burke's state-court appeal remained pending and unsettled questions of Indiana employment law and the Indiana Constitution were resolved.

HOLDINGS

1. Rooker-Feldman did not apply because the state-court decision was neither final nor on the merits.
2. A stay was appropriate under the Pullman abstention doctrine because the case presented unsettled state-law questions whose resolution could eliminate the need to decide the federal constitutional claims.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"Rooker-Feldman applies when a plaintiff has previously brought a similar claim to a state court proceeding that is both final and on the merits."

"Here, Rooker-Feldman does not apply because the state court decision is neither final nor on the merits."

"The state-court decision is also not final for purposes of Rooker-Feldman, because it is on an unresolved appeal."

"Here, Plaintiff's Constitutional claims revolve around an unresolved question of whether or not she had a property interest in her employment with IDOC as set out in Indiana's civil service classification framework."

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Callie Burke worked for the Indiana Department of Corrections as a correctional police officer and investigator. She reported communications with a prison informant who used a contraband cellphone and alleges that the information assisted prison security and outside law enforcement. IDOC terminated her in 2023 without providing a hearing, and the State Employee Appeals Commission treated her as an unclassified, at-will employee not entitled to a due process hearing. Her state-court appeal was dismissed for failure to timely file the certified agency record, and that dismissal was on appeal when she filed and amended this federal action.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Burke was terminated from employment with the Indiana Department of Corrections and pursued an administrative appeal before the Indiana State Employee Appeals Commission, which denied relief on the ground that she was an unclassified, at-will employee. The LaPorte County Circuit Court dismissed her appeal because she failed to timely file the certified agency record, and her appeal to the Indiana Court of Appeals remained pending. Burke then filed this federal action seeking declaratory relief under the Due Process and

Equal Protection Clauses. The district court denied the motion to dismiss without prejudice and stayed the federal case pending the state appeal.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Exxon Mobil Corp. v. Saudi Basic Industries Corp., 544 U.S. 280, 284-85 (2005)
- Remer v. Burlington Area School District, 205 F.3d 990, 996 (7th Cir. 2000)
- District of Columbia Court of Appeals v. Feldman, 460 U.S. 462, 483-84 n.16 (1983)
- Parker v. Lyons, 757 F.3d 701, 706 (7th Cir. 2014)
- Hadzi-Tanovic v. Johnson, 62 F.4th 394, 402-03 (7th Cir. 2023)
- Hemmer v. Indiana State Board of Animal Health, 532 F.3d 610, 614 (7th Cir. 2008)
- Andrade v. City of Hammond, 9 F.4th 947, 950 (7th Cir. 2021)
- Swartz v. Heartland Equine Rescue, 940 F.3d 387, 391 (7th Cir. 2019)
- Jakupovic v. Curran, 850 F.3d 898, 902 (7th Cir. 2017)
- International College of Surgeons v. City of Chicago, 153 F.3d 356, 360, 365 (7th Cir. 1998)
- Railroad Commission of Texas v. Pullman Co., 312 U.S. 496, 500 (1941)
- Quackenbush v. Allstate Insurance Co., 517 U.S. 706, 716-17 (1996)
- Wisconsin Right to Life State Political Action Committee v. Barland, 664 F.3d 139, 150 (7th Cir. 2011)