

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF
FLORIDA, TAMPA DIVISION

Alfred Rhiner v. State of Florida, et al.

Rhiner · No. 8:25-cv-2675-TPB-CPT · Decided February 24, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Middle District of Florida denies Alfred Rhiner’s motion to recuse the assigned judge and his construed motion for relief from an earlier procedural order. The court holds that disagreement with procedural rulings and speculative allegations of judicial bias do not satisfy the recusal standards, and it requires Rhiner to file an amended civil rights complaint using the standard form within 80 days.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Middle District of Florida, Tampa Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Thomas P. Barber
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Middle District of Florida, Tampa Division
DECIDED	February 24, 2026
DOCKET	8:25-cv-2675-TPB-CPT
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff moved for recusal under 28 U.S.C. §§ 144 and 455 and, alternatively, for reconsideration of an earlier order restricting the form and length of his amended complaint. The district court denied both requests and directed plaintiff to file an amended complaint on the standard form.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	A recusal motion under 28 U.S.C. § 455(a) is evaluated under an objective standard: whether a fully informed, objective, disinterested observer would entertain significant doubt about the judge's impartiality. Relief under Rule 60(b)(6) is available only in extraordinary circumstances.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unknown
PARTIES	Alfred Rhiner v. State of Florida, et al.

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the judge was required to recuse under 28 U.S.C. §§ 144 or 455 based on adverse procedural rulings, alleged bias, and speculative financial interests.
2. Whether Rhiner was entitled to reconsideration or relief under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 60(b)(6) from the order requiring use of the standard form for his amended complaint.
3. Whether Rhiner's amended complaint had to comply with the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure and the Middle District of Florida's local rule requiring a standard form for pro se incarcerated civil-rights complaints.

HOLDINGS

1. Section 144 did not provide a basis for recusal because Rhiner did not file the timely and sufficient affidavit required to establish personal bias or prejudice.
2. Recusal was not warranted because Rhiner's disagreement with the court's procedural rulings and his speculative, unsubstantiated allegations of a judicial financial interest did not create a reasonable question about the judge's impartiality or establish personal bias.
3. Rhiner was not entitled to relief from the prior order under Rule 60(b)(6) because the asserted difficulty of presenting his allegations on the standard form was not an extraordinary circumstance.
4. Rhiner was required to comply with the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure and the Middle District of Florida's local rule requiring incarcerated pro se litigants to use the standard form for a civil-rights complaint, and he was not required to include all accumulated evidence in the operative pleading.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Judicial rulings alone almost never constitute a valid basis for a bias or partiality motion.”

“Challenges to adverse rulings are generally grounds for appeal, not recusal.”

“A recusal motion is an improper vehicle to dispute disagreeable adverse rulings.”

“Rather, Rule 8(a) provides that a pleading must contain:”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Rhiner, a Florida state prisoner serving a life sentence for first-degree murder, filed a lengthy pro se § 1983 complaint alleging constitutional violations by prison officials. After the court required him to use the standard form for an amended civil-rights complaint and limited the amendment to the applicable page requirements,

Rhiner asserted that the ruling reflected judicial bias and impaired his ability to present his claims. He also speculated that the judge had a financial interest connected to Florida's prison and reentry systems.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Rhiner filed a 69-page pro se complaint under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 concerning alleged constitutional violations in prison. The court previously denied leave to file a 50-page amended complaint outside the required standard form, denied appointment of counsel without prejudice, and granted additional time to amend. Rhiner then sought recusal and reconsideration. The court denied the motions and gave him 80 days to file an amended complaint, warning that failure to comply would result in dismissal without further notice.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- United States v. Berger, 375 F.3d 1223, 1227 (11th Cir. 2004)
- United States v. Patti, 337 F.3d 1317, 1321 (11th Cir. 2003)
- Parker v. Connors Steel Co., 855 F.2d 1510, 1524 (11th Cir. 1988)
- Liteky v. United States, 510 U.S. 540, 555 (1994)
- McWhorter v. City of Birmingham, 906 F.2d 674, 678 (11th Cir. 1990)
- Ginsberg v. Evergreen Sec., Ltd., 570 F.3d 1257, 1274 (11th Cir. 2009)
- Wood v. Frederick, No. 21-12238, 2022 WL 1742953, at *4 (11th Cir. May 31, 2022)
- Buck v. Davis, 580 U.S. 100, 123 (2017)
- Moon v. Newsome, 863 F.2d 835, 837 (11th Cir. 1989)