

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Rayon Jones v. F. Ruiz, et al.

Case No. 25-cv-06050-CRB (PR) · No. 25-cv-06050-CRB (PR) · Decided January 29, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of California screens Rayon Jones’s First Amended Complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A. The court finds an arguably cognizable Eighth Amendment excessive-force claim against correctional officers F. Ruiz and M. Lupo, dismisses Warden Kelly Santoro based on the absence of respondeat superior liability, and orders service and an expedited dispositive-motion schedule.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Charles R. Breyer
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
DECIDED	January 29, 2026
DOCKET	25-cv-06050-CRB (PR)
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Screening of a pro se prisoner's First Amended Complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, resulting in service of the excessive-force claim against two correctional officers and dismissal of the warden from the action.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Preliminary screening under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A; pro se pleadings are liberally construed, and the complaint must be dismissed if it is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim, or seeks monetary relief from an immune defendant.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished
PARTIES	Rayon Jones v. F. Ruiz, M. Lupo, Kelly Santoro

TOPICS

- prisoners rights
- police misconduct
- section 1983
- service of process
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights

prisoner litigation

constitutional law

civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the First Amended Complaint stated a cognizable claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 for excessive force in violation of the Eighth Amendment against Ruiz and Lupo.
2. Whether the complaint stated a § 1983 claim against Warden Santoro based solely on her supervisory position.
3. What service and case-management procedures should govern the surviving claims.

HOLDINGS

1. The allegations, liberally construed, stated an arguably cognizable § 1983 claim that Ruiz and Lupo used excessive force in violation of the Eighth Amendment.
2. The complaint failed to state a § 1983 claim against Santoro based solely on her responsibility as warden for the actions or omissions of subordinate officers.
3. A prisoner complaint seeking redress from governmental officers must be screened under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, and claims that are not subject to dismissal under that statute may proceed to service.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Whenever prison officials stand accused of using excessive force in violation of the Eighth Amendment, the core judicial inquiry is whether force was applied in a good-faith effort to maintain or restore discipline, or maliciously and sadistically to cause harm.” (Opinion text at lines 8-15)

“there is no liability under § 1983 solely because one is responsible for the actions or omissions of another.” (Opinion text at lines 19-22)

“Generally, summary judgment must be granted when there is no genuine issue of material fact – that is, if there is no real dispute about any fact that would affect the result of your case, the party who asked for summary judgment is entitled to judgment as a matter of law, which will end your case.” (Opinion text at lines 15-18 of the summary-judgment notice)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Rayon Jones, an incarcerated person at Salinas Valley State Prison, alleged that on May 30, 2024, correctional officers F. Ruiz and M. Lupo became angry after a video settlement conference related to a prior § 1983 action. Jones alleged that, after she asked to speak with the captain, the officers grabbed her, slammed her to the ground, and injured the right side of her head and ear. Jones also named Warden Kelly Santoro based on her position as warden.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff, a prisoner proceeding pro se, filed a First Amended Complaint under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 alleging that correctional officers used excessive force against her. The district court conducted preliminary prisoner-

complaint screening, found an arguably cognizable Eighth Amendment excessive-force claim against F. Ruiz and M. Lupo, dismissed Warden Kelly Santoro based solely on her supervisory role, and ordered service and an expedited schedule for dispositive motions.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Balistreri v. Pacifica Police Department, 901 F.2d 696, 699 (9th Cir. 1990)
- West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988)
- Hudson v. McMillian, 503 U.S. 1, 6-7 (1992)
- Taylor v. List, 880 F.2d 1040, 1045 (9th Cir. 1989)
- Woods v. Carey, 684 F.3d 934, 935 (9th Cir. 2012)
- Stratton v. Buck, 697 F.3d 1004, 1008-09 (9th Cir. 2012)
- Wyatt v. Terhune, 315 F.3d 1108, 1120 n.14 (9th Cir. 2003)
- Albino v. Baca, 747 F.3d 1162, 1166 (9th Cir. 2014) (en banc)
- Rand v. Rowland, 154 F.3d 952, 962-63 (9th Cir. 1998) (en banc)

OPINION

1 2 3 4 5 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT 6 NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA 7
8 RAYON JONES, G35669, Case No. 25-cv-06050-CRB (PR) 9 Plaintiff, ORDER OF SERVICE
10 v. 11 F. RUIZ, et al., 12 Defendant(s). 13 Plaintiff, a prisoner at Salinas Valley State Prison
(SVSP) and frequent litigant in federal 14 court, has filed a pro se First Amended Complaint
(FAC) under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 alleging that on 15 May 30, 2024, two correctional officers at
SVSP – F. Ruiz and M. Lupo – used excessive force 16 against her.1 Plaintiff specifically alleges
that after she finished a video settlement conference in 17 connection with a prior § 1983 action,
Ruiz and Lupo “became very angry” and when she asked to 18 speak to the captain proceeded to
“grab plaintiff and use excessive force by slamming plaintiff to 19 the ground” and injuring the
right side of plaintiff’s head and ear.

ECF No. 9 (FAC) at 4. 20 DISCUSSION 21 A. Standard of Review 22 Federal courts must engage
in a preliminary screening of cases in which prisoners seek 23 redress from a governmental entity
or officer or employee of a governmental entity. 28 U.S.C. § 24 1915A(a).

The court must identify cognizable claims or dismiss the complaint, or any portion of 25 the
complaint, if the complaint “is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief 26
may be granted,” or “seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief.” Id.
27 1 § 1915A(b). Pro se pleadings must be liberally construed. Balistreri v. Pacifica Police Dep’t,
901 2 F.2d 696, 699 (9th Cir.

1990). 3 To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege two elements: (1) that a 4 right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States was violated, and (2) that the alleged 5 violation was committed by a person acting under the color of state law. *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 6 42, 48 (1988). 7 B. Legal Claims 8 Whenever prison officials stand accused of using excessive force in violation of the Eighth 9 Amendment, the core judicial inquiry is whether force was applied in a good-faith effort to 10 maintain or restore discipline, or maliciously and sadistically to cause harm.

Hudson v. 11 McMillian, 503 U.S. 1, 6-7 (1992). In determining whether the use of force was for the purpose of 12 maintaining or restoring discipline, or for the malicious and sadistic purpose of causing harm, a 13 court may evaluate the need for application of force, the relationship between that need and the 14 amount of force used, the extent of any injury inflicted, the threat reasonably perceived by the 15 responsible officials, and any efforts made to temper the severity of a forceful response.

Id. at 7. 16 Liberally construed, plaintiff's allegations appear to state an arguably cognizable claim 17 under § 1983 for use of excessive force in violation of the Eighth Amendment against Ruiz and 18 Lupo and will be ordered served against these two defendants. But Warden Kelly Santoro is 19 dismissed because she is named based on her capacity as warden and it is well established that 20 there is no liability under § 1983 solely because one is responsible for the actions or omissions of 21 another.

See *Taylor v. List*, 880 F.2d 1040, 1045 (9th Cir. 1989) (there is no "respondeat 22 superior" liability under § 1983). 23 CONCLUSION 24 For the foregoing reasons and for good cause shown, 25 1. The following defendant(s) shall be served: 26 a. F. Ruiz, Correctional Officer at SVSP; and 27 b. M. Lupo, Correctional Officer at SVSP. 1 Service on the listed defendant(s) shall proceed under the California Department of 2 Corrections and Rehabilitation's (CDCR) e-service program for civil rights cases from prisoners 3 in CDCR custody.

In accordance with the program, the clerk is directed to serve on CDCR via 4 email the following documents: the operative FAC, this order of service, a CDCR Report of E- 5 Service Waiver form and a summons. The clerk also shall serve a copy of this order on the 6 plaintiff. 7 No later than 40 days after service of this order via email on CDCR, CDCR shall file with 8 the court a completed CDCR Report of E-Service Waiver advising the court which defendant(s) 9 listed in this order will be waiving service of process without the need for service by the United 10 States Marshal Service (USMS) and which defendant(s) decline to waive service or could not be 11 reached.

CDCR also shall provide a copy of the CDCR Report of E-Service Waiver to the 12 California Attorney General's Office which, within 21 days, shall file with the court a waiver of 13 service of process for the defendant(s) who are waiving service. 14 Upon the filing of the CDCR Report of

E-Service Waiver, the clerk shall prepare for each 15 defendant who has not waived service according to the CDCR Report of E-Service Waiver a 16 USM-285 Form.

The clerk shall provide to the USMS the completed USM-285 forms and copies 17 of this order, the summons and the operative complaint for service upon each defendant who has 18 not waived service. The clerk also shall provide to the USMS a copy of the CDCR Report of E- 19 Service Waiver. 20 2.

In order to expedite the resolution of this case, the court orders as follows: 21 a. No later than 90 days from the date of this order, defendants shall serve and 22 file a motion for summary judgment or other dispositive motion. A motion for summary judgment 23 must be supported by adequate factual documentation and must conform in all respects to Federal 24 Rule of Civil Procedure 56, and must include as exhibits all records and incident reports stemming 25 from the events at issue.

A motion for summary judgment also must be accompanied by a Rand 26 notice so that plaintiff will have fair, timely and adequate notice of what is required of him in 27 order to oppose the motion. *Woods v. Carey*, 684 F.3d 934, 935 (9th Cir. 2012) (notice 1 concurrently with motion for summary judgment). A motion to dismiss for failure to exhaust 2 available administrative remedies (where such a motion, rather than a motion for summary 3 judgment for failure to exhaust, is appropriate) must be accompanied by a similar notice.

Stratton 4 v. Buck, 697 F.3d 1004, 1008 (9th Cir. 2012); *Woods*, 684 F.3d at 935 (notice requirement set out 5 in *Wyatt v. Terhune*, 315 F.3d 1108 (9th Cir. 2003), overruled on other grounds by *Albino v. 6 Baca*, 747 F.3d 1162, 1166 (9th Cir. 2014) (en banc), must be served concurrently with motion to 7 dismiss for failure to exhaust available administrative remedies).

8 If defendants are of the opinion that this case cannot be resolved by summary judgment or 9 other dispositive motion, they shall so inform the court prior to the date their motion is due. All 10 papers filed with the court shall be served promptly on plaintiff. 11 b. Plaintiff must serve and file an opposition or statement of non-opposition to 12 the dispositive motion not more than 28 days after the motion is served and filed.

13 c. Plaintiff is advised that a motion for summary judgment under Rule 56 of 14 the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure will, if granted, end your case. Rule 56 tells you what you 15 must do in order to oppose a motion for summary judgment. Generally, summary judgment must 16 be granted when there is no genuine issue of material fact – that is, if there is no real dispute about 17 any fact that would affect the result of your case, the party who asked for summary judgment is 18 entitled to judgment as a matter of law, which will end your case.

When a party you are suing 19 makes a motion for summary judgment that is properly supported by declarations (or other sworn 20 testimony), you cannot simply rely on what your complaint says. Instead, you must set out 21 specific facts in declarations, depositions, answers to

interrogatories, or authenticated documents, 22 as provided in [current Rule 56(c)], that contradicts the facts shown in the defendant's declarations 23 and documents and show that there is a genuine issue of material fact for trial.

If you do not 24 submit your own evidence in opposition, summary judgment, if appropriate, may be entered 25 against you. If summary judgment is granted, your case will be dismissed and there will be no 26 trial. *Rand v. Rowland*, 154 F.3d 952, 962-63 (9th Cir. 1998) (en banc) (App. A). 27 Plaintiff also is advised that a motion to dismiss for failure to exhaust available 1 prejudice.

You must "develop a record" and present it in your opposition in order to dispute any 2 "factual record" presented by the defendants in their motion to dismiss. *Wyatt v. Terhune*, 315 F.3d 1108, 1120 n.14 (9th Cir. 2003). You have the right to present any evidence to show that you 4 did exhaust your available administrative remedies before coming to federal court.

Such evidence 5 may include: (1) declarations, which are statements signed under penalty of perjury by you or 6 others who have personal knowledge of relevant matters; (2) authenticated documents – 7 documents accompanied by a declaration showing where they came from and why they are 8 authentic, or other sworn papers such as answers to interrogatories or depositions; (3) statements 9 in your complaint insofar as they were made under penalty of perjury and they show that you have 10 personal knowledge of the matters state therein.

In considering a motion to dismiss for failure to 11 exhaust, the court can decide disputed issues of fact with regard to this portion of the case. 12 *Stratton*, 697 F.3d at 1008-09. 13 (The *Rand* and *Wyatt/Stratton* notices above do not excuse defendants' obligation to serve 14 said notices again concurrently with motions to dismiss for failure to exhaust available 15 administrative remedies and motions for summary judgment.

Woods, 684 F.3d at 935.) 16 d. Defendants must serve and file a reply to an opposition not more than 14 17 days after the opposition is served and filed. 18 e. The motion shall be deemed submitted as of the date the reply is due. No 19 hearing will be held on the motion unless the court so orders at a later date. 20 3. Discovery may be taken in accordance with the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.

21 No further court order under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 30(a)(2) or Local Rule 16 is required 22 before the parties may conduct discovery. 23 4. All communications by plaintiff with the court must be served on defendants, or 24 defendants' counsel once counsel has been designated, by mailing a true copy of the document to 25 defendants or defendants' counsel.

26 5. It is plaintiff's responsibility to prosecute this case. Plaintiff must keep the court 27 and all parties informed of any change of address and must comply with the court's orders in a] of Civil Procedure 41(b). 2 IT ISSO ORDERED. 3 Dated: January 29, 2026 4 2K CHARLES R. BREYER 5 United States District Judge 6 7 8 9 10 1] 12 15 16 17 Z 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28

