

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF KANSAS

Austin Bryce Langley v. Will Manly, et al.

Langley · No. 26-3033-JWL · Decided February 20, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of Kansas orders pro se plaintiff Austin Bryce Langley to show cause why his 42 U.S.C. § 1983 complaint should not be dismissed. The court discusses the Heck bar and habeas-corpus requirements, Eleventh Amendment and prosecutorial immunity, and potential Younger abstention based on ongoing Kansas criminal proceedings. The court sets March 20, 2026, as the deadline for Langley’s written response.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Kansas
WRITING FOR THE COURT	John W. Lungstrum
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Kansas
DECIDED	February 20, 2026
DOCKET	26-3033-JWL
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff brought a pro se civil-rights action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 while incarcerated and proceeding in forma pauperis. The court issued a memorandum and order requiring Plaintiff to show cause why the complaint should not be dismissed for failure to state a claim, immunity, the Heck bar, the habeas nature of the claims, and Younger abstention.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), the court must dismiss an in forma pauperis action at any time if it is frivolous or malicious, fails to state a claim, or seeks monetary relief from an immune defendant. The court liberally construes a pro se complaint, accepts well-pleaded allegations as true, and applies the plausibility standard under Twombly and related authorities.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unpublished district-court memorandum and order to show cause; generally nonprecedential and limited to the case.
PARTIES	Austin Bryce Langley v. Will Manly, Carolyn Smith, Kris Kobach

TOPICS

section 1983 prisoners rights federal habeas corpus sovereign immunity civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights constitutional law criminal procedure prisoner litigation federal habeas corpus

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Plaintiff's challenge to the validity or length of his state sentence is cognizable in a § 1983 action or must instead be brought through habeas corpus.
2. Whether Plaintiff's damages claims are barred by Heck v. Humphrey because success would necessarily imply the invalidity of his conviction or sentence.
3. Whether the named defendants are immune from Plaintiff's claims under the Eleventh Amendment or absolute prosecutorial immunity.
4. Whether Younger abstention applies because Plaintiff's state criminal proceedings are ongoing and provide an adequate forum for his constitutional claims.
5. Whether the complaint satisfies the pleading requirements applicable to an in forma pauperis § 1983 action.

HOLDINGS

1. A state prisoner's constitutional challenge to the fact or length of custody, where the requested remedy would be release or a speedier release, must be brought in habeas corpus rather than under § 1983 and is subject to exhaustion of available state remedies.
2. A § 1983 damages claim that would necessarily imply the invalidity of a conviction or sentence is not cognizable unless the conviction or sentence has already been overturned, reversed, or otherwise invalidated.
3. States, arms of the state, and state officials sued in their official capacities are generally immune from suits for money damages absent consent or a valid exception, and Congress did not abrogate that immunity through § 1983.
4. Prosecutors are absolutely immune from damages liability for courtroom advocacy and other functions intimately associated with the judicial phase of the criminal process, including statements made during trial, even if the statements are alleged to be false.
5. Federal courts must abstain from hearing claims when ongoing state judicial proceedings implicate important state interests and provide an adequate opportunity to litigate federal constitutional issues, absent extraordinary circumstances; the doctrine may extend to damages claims when a judgment would have preclusive effects on the state proceeding.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“a § 1983 action is a proper remedy for a state prisoner who is making a constitutional challenge to the

conditions of his prison life, but not to the fact or length of his custody.” (Section III.1)

“Therefore, the prosecutors in this case enjoy absolute prosecutorial immunity for statements made during Plaintiff’s criminal trial.” (Section III.2)

“Once these three conditions are met, Younger abstention is non-discretionary and, absent extraordinary circumstances, a district court is required to abstain.” (Section III.3)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff, a convicted prisoner housed at the Shawnee County Jail, alleged that prosecutors made false statements during his criminal proceedings concerning his threat, the victim's injuries, and the victim's pain. He challenged his first-degree attempted-murder and aggravated-battery conviction and a sentence of 55 years and one month, including restitution of \$17,228.45, and also referred to a pending battery charge. He sought damages equal to the restitution ordered in his state criminal case.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff challenged aspects of his state criminal proceedings, conviction, sentence, and restitution obligation. The court granted leave to proceed in forma pauperis and conducted statutory screening under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B). Rather than immediately dismissing the action, the court granted Plaintiff until March 20, 2026, to show good cause why dismissal should not occur.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988)
- Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007)
- Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555, 558, 570 (2007)
- Anderson v. Blake, 469 F.3d 910, 913 (10th Cir. 2006)
- Northington v. Jackson, 973 F.2d 1518, 1523 (10th Cir. 1992)
- Hall v. Bellmon, 935 F.2d 1106, 1110 (10th Cir. 1991)
- Nasious v. Two Unknown B.I.C.E. Agents, 492 F.3d 1158, 1163 (10th Cir. 2007)
- Whitney v. New Mexico, 113 F.3d 1170, 1173-74 (10th Cir. 1997)
- Kay v. Bemis, 500 F.3d 1214, 1218 (10th Cir. 2007)
- Smith v. United States, 561 F.3d 1090, 1098 (10th Cir. 2009)
- Robbins v. Oklahoma, 519 F.3d 1242, 1247 (10th Cir. 2008)
- Preiser v. Rodriguez, 411 U.S. 475, 499 (1973)
- Heck v. Humphrey, 512 U.S. 477, 482, 486-87 (1994)
- Montez v. McKinna, 208 F.3d 862, 866 (10th Cir. 2000)

- O'Sullivan v. Boerckel, 526 U.S. 838, 842 (1999)
- Woodford v. Ngo, 548 U.S. 81, 92 (2006)
- Rose v. Lundy, 455 U.S. 509, 518-19 (1982)
- Peterson v. Martinez, 707 F.3d 1197, 1205 (10th Cir. 2013)
- Wagoner County Rural Water District No. 2 v. Grand River Dam Authority, 577 F.3d 1255, 1258 (10th Cir. 2009)
- Pennhurst State School & Hospital v. Halderman, 465 U.S. 89, 100 (1984)
- Quern v. Jordan, 440 U.S. 332, 338-45 (1979)
- Ruiz v. McDonnell, 299 F.3d 1173, 1181 (10th Cir. 2002)
- Will v. Michigan Department of State Police, 491 U.S. 58, 71 (1989)
- Colby v. Herrick, 849 F.3d 1273, 1276 (10th Cir. 2017)
- Callahan v. Poppell, 471 F.3d 1155, 1158 (10th Cir. 2006)
- Wanjiku v. Johnson County, 173 F. Supp. 3d 1217, 1236 (D. Kan. 2016)
- Oltremari v. Kansas Social & Rehabilitation Services, 871 F. Supp. 1331, 1347 (D. Kan. 1994)
- Free Speech Coalition, Inc. v. Anderson, 119 F.4th 732, 741 (10th Cir. 2024)
- Goico v. Kansas, 2020 WL 3034814, at *2 (D. Kan. 2020)
- Nelson v. Schoenhofer, 2017 WL 4758966, at *2 (D. Kan. 2017)
- Maley v. Kansas, 543 F. App'x 889, 2013 WL 6171080, at *1 (10th Cir. Nov. 26, 2013)
- Imbler v. Pachtman, 424 U.S. 409, 410, 430-31 (1976)
- Chilcoat v. San Juan County, 41 F.4th 1196, 1208-10 (10th Cir. 2022)
- Bledsoe v. Vanderbilt, 934 F.3d 1112, 1117 (10th Cir. 2019)
- Briscoe v. LaHue, 460 U.S. 325, 342 (1983)
- Forrester v. White, 484 U.S. 219, 229 (1988)
- Burns v. Reed, 500 U.S. 478, 489-90, 494 (1991)
- Mink v. Suthers, 482 F.3d 1244, 1259, 1261-62 (10th Cir. 2007)
- Nielander v. Board of County Commissioners, 582 F.3d 1155, 1164 (10th Cir. 2009)
- Becker v. Kroll, 494 F.3d 904, 925 (10th Cir. 2007)
- Thomas v. Kaven, 765 F.3d 1183, 1193 (10th Cir. 2014)
- Buckley v. Fitzsimmons, 509 U.S. 259, 273-74 (1993)
- Rex v. Teeple, 753 F.2d 840, 843 (10th Cir. 1985)
- Adams v. Hanson, 656 F.3d 397, 403 (6th Cir. 2011)
- Younger v. Harris, 401 U.S. 37, 44-45 (1971)
- Buck v. Myers, 244 F. App'x 193, 197 (10th Cir. 2007)
- Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska v. Stovall, 341 F.3d 1202, 1204 (10th Cir. 2003)
- Crown Point I, LLC v. Intermountain Rural Electric Association, 319 F.3d 1211, 1215 (10th Cir. 2003)
- In re Troff, 488 F.3d 1237, 1240 (10th Cir. 2007)
- Capps v. Sullivan, 13 F.3d 350, 354 n.2 (10th Cir. 1993)

- Robb v. Connolly, 111 U.S. 624, 637 (1884)
- Steffel v. Thompson, 415 U.S. 452, 460-61 (1974)
- D.L. v. Unified School District No. 497, 392 F.3d 1223, 1228 (10th Cir. 2004)
- Garza v. Burnett, 672 F.3d 1217, 1220 (10th Cir. 2012)
- Wallace v. Kato, 549 U.S. 384, 393 (2007)
- Myers v. Garff, 876 F.2d 79, 81 (10th Cir. 1989)

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