

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
VIRGINIA, RICHMOND DIVISION

Christopher S. George v. Sergeant Brown

George v. Brown · No. 3:24CV318 (RCY) · Decided December 15, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia grants Christopher S. George’s motion for default judgment against Sergeant Brown in a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 action. The court concludes that the allegations establish deliberate indifference under the Eighth Amendment based on Brown’s alleged unlocking of George’s cell during a lockdown, which enabled an inmate assault. The court awards \$94,042.96 in damages, consisting of documented medical expenses and compensation for pain and suffering.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, Richmond Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Roderick C. Young
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia
DECIDED	December 15, 2025
DOCKET	3:24CV318 (RCY)
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff moved for entry of default judgment under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 55(b)(2) after the Clerk entered default against Defendant for failing to plead or otherwise defend. The Court held a damages hearing and granted the motion.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The Court exercised sound discretion in deciding whether to enter default judgment. It accepted well-pleaded factual allegations as admitted, but analyzed whether those allegations stated a claim under the Rule 12(b)(6) plausibility standard and independently determined the amount of damages.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished
PARTIES	Christopher S. George v. Sergeant Brown

TOPICS

default judgment

service of process

section 1983

prisoners rights

damages

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

civil rights

prisoner litigation

constitutional law

remedies

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the Court had subject matter jurisdiction, personal jurisdiction, and proper venue to enter default judgment.
2. Whether George adequately served Sergeant Brown so that the Court could exercise jurisdiction over her.
3. Whether the well-pleaded allegations, deemed admitted upon default, stated an Eighth Amendment deliberate-indifference claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.
4. What amount of compensatory damages was supported by the evidence presented at the default-judgment hearing.

HOLDINGS

1. After the Clerk entered default and the Court determined that the well-pleaded allegations stated a viable claim, the Court had discretion to enter default judgment under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 55(b) (2).
2. Service was adequate because George posted the summons and Complaint at the main entrance of Brown's residence, mailed the process to her, and established that Brown received actual, timely notice; Virginia's service savings provision cured any defect in the form of service.
3. The Complaint stated an Eighth Amendment deliberate-indifference claim because Brown allegedly unlocked George's cell during lockdown, exposing him to a substantial risk of serious harm from other inmates, and that conduct enabled the ensuing attack.
4. Qualified immunity did not bar the claim because an intentional violation of the Eighth Amendment is sufficient to overcome qualified immunity.
5. The amount of damages was not deemed admitted merely because Defendant defaulted; the Court independently determined an appropriate award of \$94,042.96 based on the hearing evidence.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Upon default, facts alleged in the complaint are deemed admitted and the appropriate inquiry is whether the facts as alleged state a claim.” (II)

“Because Sergeant Brown had actual, timely notice of the lawsuit filed against her, any questions about the proper form of such service are rendered moot.” (III.B)

“Sergeant Brown, however, actively unlocked Mr. George’s cell during a prison lock-down, leaving him exposed to a substantial risk of serious harm by unsecured inmates.” (III.C)

“Unlike factual allegations, which may be taken as true, “the Court does not automatically deem admitted the amount of damages” alleged by the plaintiff.” (III.D)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

George was incarcerated at Sussex II State Prison when Sergeant Brown, a correctional officer, unlocked his cell during a lockdown and left the door cracked. Five inmates from another housing pod entered the cell and attacked George with a shank, causing six stab wounds, a chipped tooth, loss of consciousness, physical pain, emotional distress, and scarring. Brown did not respond to the lawsuit after service, and the Clerk entered default.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

George filed this 42 U.S.C. § 1983 action on May 7, 2024, alleging that Sergeant Brown unlocked his prison cell during lockdown, enabling other inmates to enter and assault him. After service efforts, Brown failed to respond, and the Clerk entered default on November 1, 2024. George moved for default judgment on April 4, 2025. Following a December 11, 2025 hearing at which George and his counsel appeared, the Court granted default judgment and awarded \$94,042.96 in damages.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Goldbelt Wolf, LLC v. Operational Wear Armor, LLC, 2016 WL 726532, at *2 (E.D. Va. Feb. 22, 2016)
- Colleton Prep. Acad., Inc. v. Hoover Universal, Inc., 616 F.3d 413, 417-18 (4th Cir. 2010)
- Labuda v. SEF Stainless Steel, Inc., 2012 WL 1899417, at *2 (D. Md. May 23, 2012)
- S.E.C. v. Lawbaugh, 359 F. Supp. 2d 418, 421 (D. Md. 2005)
- EMI April Music, Inc. v. White, 618 F. Supp. 2d 497, 505 (E.D. Va. 2009)
- Globalsantafe Corp. v. Globalsantafe.Com, 250 F. Supp. 2d 610, 612 n.3 (E.D. Va. 2003)
- Getir U.S., Inc. v. <GETIR190.COM>, a domain name, 2023 WL 3061870, at *4 (E.D. Va. Mar. 14, 2023)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009)
- Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007)
- Burbach Broadcasting Co. of Del. v. Elkins Radio Corp., 278 F.3d 401, 406 (4th Cir. 2002)
- Labram v. Havel, 43 F.3d 918, 921 (4th Cir. 1995)
- PharMerica East, LLC v. Healthlink of Va. Shores, LLC, 2020 WL 877983, at *3 (E.D. Va. Feb. 20, 2020)
- J&J Sports Prods., Inc. v. Panana, LLC, 2014 WL 5454323, at *1 (D. Md. Oct. 24, 2014)
- Citibank, N.A. v. Triplett, 2014 WL 1153290, at *3 (E.D. Va. Mar. 20, 2014)
- Goodyear Dunlop Tires Operations, S.A. v. Brown, 564 U.S. 915, 924 (2011)
- Goldbelt Wolf, LLC v. Operational Wear Armor, LLC, 2016 WL 1756487, at *3 (E.D. Va. May 3, 2016)
- Armco, Inc. v. Penrod-Stauffer Bldg. Sys., Inc., 744 F.2d 1087, 1089 (4th Cir. 1984)

- Galloway v. Martorello, 2023 WL 5180332, at *4 (E.D. Va. Aug. 11, 2013)
- Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 832-34, 837, 842, 847 (1994)
- Hudson v. McMillian, 503 U.S. 1 (1992)
- Hudson v. Palmer, 468 U.S. 517, 526-27 (1984)
- Cortes-Quinones v. Jimenez-Nettleship, 842 F.2d 556, 558 (1st Cir. 1988)
- Rhodes v. Chapman, 452 U.S. 337, 347 (1981)
- Cartagena v. Lovell, 103 F.4th 171, 181 (4th Cir. 2024)
- Wilson v. Seiter, 501 U.S. 294, 302-03 (1991)
- Thorpe v. Clarke, 37 F.4th 926, 934 (4th Cir. 2022)
- Smith v. Nelson, 2024 WL 4863293, at *4 (E.D. Va. Nov. 21, 2024)
- Cadence Bank, N.A. v. DRAAM, Corp., 2025 WL 1564799, at *3 (E.D. Va. Jan. 10, 2025)
- Alstom Power, Inc. v. Graham, 2016 WL 354754, at *2 (E.D. Va. Jan. 27, 2016)