

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF
INDIANA

Michael-Tyrone Sturghiss v. Ronald Dinsmore LLC, Logan
McTarnsey, Jacob Lightsey, and Greenwood City Police

Sturghiss · No. 1:25-cv-01953-TWP-KMB · Decided April 20, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Southern District of Indiana grants the defendants’ motion for judgment on the pleadings without prejudice in a pro se civil-rights action arising from a traffic stop, detention, arrest, and alleged use of excessive force. The court disregards sovereign-citizen theories but concludes that the plaintiff plausibly alleged unlawful detention, excessive force, assault, and battery. Because the complaint does not specify each individual defendant’s conduct, the plaintiff is given until May 14, 2026, to file an amended complaint.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Southern District of Indiana
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Tanya Walton Pratt
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Southern District of Indiana
DECIDED	April 20, 2026
DOCKET	1:25-cv-01953-TWP-KMB
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendants moved for judgment on the pleadings under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(c). The court granted the motion without prejudice, dismissed the complaint subject to amendment, and granted plaintiff leave to file an amended complaint identifying each individual defendant's alleged conduct.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	A Rule 12(c) motion is analyzed under the same standard as a Rule 12(b)(6) motion. The court accepts well-pleaded factual allegations as true, draws reasonable inferences in favor of the nonmoving party, and may grant judgment only when the plaintiff cannot prove facts supporting relief. Unsupported legal conclusions and allegations contradicted by the complaint need not be accepted.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished, nonprecedential district court order

TOPICS

motion for judgment on the pleadings

section 1983

police misconduct

civil rights

assault

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

civil rights

constitutional law

torts

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether defendants were entitled to judgment on the pleadings because the complaint relied in part on discredited sovereign-citizen theories.
2. Whether the complaint adequately pleaded unlawful detention, false arrest, excessive force, and state-law assault and battery claims at the Rule 12(c) stage.
3. Whether the complaint stated claims against the individual defendants when it did not allege each defendant's personal involvement or specific misconduct.
4. Whether plaintiff should be granted leave to amend before dismissal with prejudice.

HOLDINGS

1. The court disregarded arguments based on sovereign-citizen theories but did not dismiss all claims solely because those theories appeared in the complaint; non-sovereign factual theories were construed and evaluated separately.
2. Accepting the allegations as true and construing the pro se complaint liberally, plaintiff adequately pleaded that he was detained or arrested without reasonable suspicion or probable cause, that officers used excessive force, and that defendants committed state-law assault and battery.
3. The complaint failed to state claims against the individual defendants because it did not allege which defendant participated in the excessive force or battery and did not attribute specific misconduct to any named defendant.
4. The court granted plaintiff an opportunity to amend because amendment was not shown to be futile and the action was at an early stage.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Regardless of an individual’s claimed status of descent, be it as a “sovereign citizen,” ...that person is not beyond the jurisdiction of the courts.” (III)

“Determining whether an officer's use of force is reasonable depends on the totality of the circumstances, “including the severity of the crime at issue, whether the suspect poses an immediate threat to the safety of the officers or others, and whether [he] is actively resisting arrest or attempting to evade arrest by flight.”” (III)

“For the foregoing reasons, the Defendants’ Motion for Judgment on the Pleadings (Dkt. 15), is GRANTED but without prejudice.” (V)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Sturghiss alleged that officers stopped his vehicle for a minor traffic infraction involving a license plate, detained and arrested him without reasonable suspicion or probable cause, and used unnecessary force by drawing weapons, holding him at gunpoint, forcibly removing him from the vehicle, seizing his phone, and handcuffing him. He alleged that he was not resisting or posing a danger and that his vehicle was seized and not returned. The complaint asserted unlawful stop and detention, excessive force, and state-law assault and battery claims, but did not identify which individual defendant performed which acts.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Sturghiss filed a pro se civil-rights action on September 26, 2025, arising from a traffic stop, detention, arrest, and alleged use of force. The court screened the complaint, dismissed the Monell claim against Greenwood City Police and interstate-abduction claims, and allowed Fourth Amendment and state-law claims to proceed. After defendants answered, they moved for judgment on the pleadings. The court found that some claims were adequately pleaded but that the complaint failed to allege personal involvement by any individual defendant, granted the motion without prejudice, and allowed amendment through May 14, 2026.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Emergency Services Billing Corp. v. Allstate Insurance Co., 668 F.3d 459, 464 (7th Cir. 2012)
- Pisciotta v. Old National Bancorp, 499 F.3d 629, 633 (7th Cir. 2007)
- Frey v. Bank One, 91 F.3d 45, 46 (7th Cir. 1996)
- Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555-56 (2007)
- Hecker v. Deere & Co., 556 F.3d 575, 580 (7th Cir. 2009)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009)
- N. Indiana Gun & Outdoor Shows, Inc. v. City of South Bend, 163 F.3d 449, 452 (7th Cir. 1998)
- Craigs, Inc. v. General Electric Capital Corp., 12 F.3d 686, 688 (7th Cir. 1993)
- R.J.R. Services, Inc. v. Aetna Casualty & Surety Co., 895 F.2d 279, 281 (7th Cir. 1990)
- United States v. Benabe, 654 F.3d 753, 767 (7th Cir. 2011)
- Bey v. State of Indiana, 847 F.3d 559, 559-60 (7th Cir. 2017)
- Graham v. Connor, 490 U.S. 386, 395-96 (1989)
- Colbert v. City of Chicago, 851 F.3d 649, 657 (7th Cir. 2017)
- Gonzalez v. McHenry County, Illinois, 40 F.4th 824, 828 (7th Cir. 2022)
- Abu-Shawish v. United States, 898 F.3d 726, 738 (7th Cir. 2018)
- Tate v. SCR Medical Transportation, 809 F.3d 343, 346 (7th Cir. 2016)
- Luevano v. Wal-Mart, 722 F.3d 1014 (7th Cir. 2013)

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