

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
INDIANA, SOUTH BEND DIVISION

Terry Donald Rutledge a/k/a Tori Elise Rutledge v. Kobie
Stoppenhagen, et al.

Rutledge · No. 3:24-CV-963-JD-AZ · Decided February 23, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana denies defendants’ joint motion for summary judgment in Terry Donald Rutledge’s prisoner civil-rights action. The court holds that prison officials made administrative remedies unavailable by improperly rejecting Rutledge’s grievances as untimely, and that the grievances sufficiently alerted officials to her excessive-force and medical-care claims under the Eighth Amendment. The court also denies as moot Rutledge’s motion for a status update.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana, South Bend Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Jon E. DeGuilio
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana, South Bend Division
DECIDED	February 23, 2026
DOCKET	3:24-CV-963-JD-AZ
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendants moved for summary judgment on the ground that Rutledge failed to exhaust available administrative remedies under the Prison Litigation Reform Act before filing her Eighth Amendment claims.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Summary judgment must be granted when there is no genuine dispute as to any material fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. The court construes facts and reasonable inferences in favor of the nonmoving party. Defendants bear the burden of proving failure to exhaust as an affirmative defense.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court opinion

PARTIES

Terry Donald Rutledge a/k/a Tori Elise Rutledge v. Kobie Stoppenhagen, et al.

TOPICS

summary judgment

prisoners rights

civil rights

civil procedure

cruel and unusual punishment

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

prisoner civil rights

constitutional law

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether defendants were entitled to summary judgment because Rutledge failed to exhaust available administrative remedies before filing suit.
2. Whether Rutledge's May 10 grievances sufficiently alerted prison officials to her excessive-force and denial-of-medical-care claims.
3. Whether the prison grievance office's rejection of the May 10 grievances as untimely rendered the administrative remedies unavailable.

HOLDINGS

1. Defendants were not entitled to summary judgment because the undisputed evidence showed that the grievance office improperly rejected Rutledge's May 10 grievances as untimely, thereby making the administrative remedies unavailable.
2. The May 10 grievances were sufficient to exhaust Rutledge's excessive-force and denial-of-medical-care claims because they gave prison officials notice of the problems and identified the correctional and nursing personnel involved closely enough to indicate the defendants were targets.
3. Summary judgment was denied because defendants failed to meet their burden of showing that Rutledge had available administrative remedies that she failed to exhaust before filing suit.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Improperly rejecting these grievances made Rutledge’s administrative remedies unavailable.”

“Because the state defendants have not met their burden to show Rutledge had available administrative remedies she did not exhaust before filing this lawsuit, their motion for summary judgment must be denied.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Rutledge alleged that correctional officers used excessive force by spraying her with mace after an April 25, 2024, suicide attempt and that correctional and nursing staff denied her medical care after she injured her head. The Miami Correctional Facility grievance process required a formal grievance, a Level I appeal, and a Level II appeal, with the initial grievance submitted within ten business days. Rutledge dated and asserted that she submitted two grievances on May 10, 2024, but the facility did not receive them until June 11 and rejected them

as untimely. The court found the process required submission within the deadline, not receipt by the grievance office within that period.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Rutledge, an incarcerated self-represented plaintiff, proceeded on personal-capacity claims for damages arising from alleged excessive force and denial of medical care following a suicide attempt. Defendants jointly moved for summary judgment based on nonexhaustion. After briefing, the court denied the motion, concluding that the prison grievance office improperly rejected Rutledge's grievances as untimely and thereby rendered the administrative remedies unavailable; it also denied as moot Rutledge's motion for a status update.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc., 477 U.S. 242, 248 (1986)
- Heft v. Moore, 351 F.3d 278, 282 (7th Cir. 2003)
- Goodman v. Nat'l Sec. Agency, Inc., 621 F.3d 651, 654 (7th Cir. 2010)
- Perez v. Wisconsin Dep't of Corr., 182 F.3d 532, 535 (7th Cir. 1999)
- King v. McCarty, 781 F.3d 889, 893 (7th Cir. 2015)
- Lockett v. Bonson, 937 F.3d 1016, 1025 (7th Cir. 2019)
- Woodford v. Ngo, 548 U.S. 81, 102 (2006)
- Kaba v. Stepp, 458 F.3d 678, 684 (7th Cir. 2006)
- Dole v. Chandler, 438 F.3d 804, 809 (7th Cir. 2006)
- Maddox v. Love, 655 F.3d 709, 722 (7th Cir. 2011)
- Schillinger v. Kiley, 954 F.3d 990, 995-96 (7th Cir. 2020)
- King v. Dart, 63 F.4th 602, 608 (7th Cir. 2023)
- Bowers v. Dart, 1 F.4th 513, 517 (7th Cir. 2021)
- Pavay v. Conley, 544 F.3d 739 (7th Cir. 2008)