

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF UTAH

Joshua James Hill v. Salt Lake County Third District Court, et al.

Hill · No. 2:25-cv-00919 · Decided April 13, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of Utah determined that Joshua James Hill’s pro se civil rights complaint failed to state a plausible claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against his grandparents’ estate and that the Eleventh Amendment barred claims against Utah’s Third District Court. The court permitted Hill to file an amended complaint by May 4, 2026 and temporarily continued the waiver of the filing fee pending screening.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Utah
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Daphne A. Oberg
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Utah
DECIDED	April 13, 2026
DOCKET	2:25-cv-00919
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Pro se plaintiff brought a civil-rights action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 without paying the filing fee. The court screened the complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii), determined that the complaint failed to state a claim against the grandparents' estate and that the Third District Court was immune under the Eleventh Amendment, and permitted plaintiff to file an amended complaint.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court applied the Rule 12(b)(6) failure-to-state-a-claim standard through 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii), accepting well-pleaded factual allegations as true, viewing them in the light most favorable to plaintiff, and disregarding conclusory allegations. The court also independently examined subject-matter jurisdiction and liberally construed the pro se complaint.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential
PARTIES	Joshua James Hill v. Salt Lake County Third District Court, Estate/Trusts of Robert Quintin Hill and Mary Coe Hill

TOPICS

section 1983 eleventh amendment immunity sovereign immunity motions to dismiss civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

Civil rights Federal civil procedure Sovereign immunity Pro se litigation Probate and trusts

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the complaint stated a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against the private estate of Hill's grandparents.
2. Whether the Eleventh Amendment barred Hill's § 1983 claims against Utah's Third District Court.
3. Whether Hill should be granted leave to amend despite the deficiencies in his pro se complaint.

HOLDINGS

1. The complaint failed to state a § 1983 claim against the grandparents' estate because the estate was a private party and Hill alleged no state action or concerted action with state officials.
2. The Eleventh Amendment barred Hill's § 1983 claims against Utah's Third District Court because the court is an arm of the State of Utah, Utah had not waived immunity, and Congress had not abrogated that immunity through § 1983.
3. The pro se plaintiff was permitted to file an amended complaint because dismissal for failure to state a claim is proper only when it is obvious the plaintiff cannot prevail on the alleged facts and amendment would be futile.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“To establish a cause of action under [§] 1983, a plaintiff must allege (1) deprivation of a federal right by (2) a person acting under color of state law.”

“Dismissal of a pro se complaint for failure to state a claim is proper only where it is obvious that the plaintiff cannot prevail on the facts he has alleged and it would be futile to give him an opportunity to amend.”

“Like the state-action requirement of the Fourteenth Amendment, the under-color-of-state-law element of § 1983 excludes from its reach merely private conduct, no matter how discriminatory or wrongful.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Hill alleged that Utah's Third District Court would not provide documents concerning his deceased grandparents, their estate or trust documents, wills, or bank accounts. He claimed he had not received assets, money, or health-insurance benefits from the estate or trusts and sought death certificates and access to estate proceedings and bank accounts. The complaint alleged no misconduct by the estate, its representatives, or trustees, and no facts showing concerted action with state officials.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Hill filed a pro se § 1983 complaint against Utah's Third District Court and his deceased grandparents' estate, together with a motion to waive the filing fee. The court temporarily granted the fee-waiver motion and stayed the matter for screening. After screening, the court found the complaint deficient but granted leave to amend by May 4, 2026, and continued the temporary fee waiver pending screening of any amended complaint.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Kay v. Bemis, 500 F.3d 1214, 1217 (10th Cir. 2007)
- Hogan v. Winder, 762 F.3d 1096, 1104 (10th Cir. 2014)
- Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 547, 555 (2007)
- Wilson v. Montano, 715 F.3d 847, 852 (10th Cir. 2013)
- Hall v. Bellmon, 935 F.2d 1106, 1110 (10th Cir. 1991)
- Kan. Penn Gaming, LLC v. Collins, 656 F.3d 1210, 1214 (10th Cir. 2011)
- 1image Software, Inc. v. Reynolds & Reynolds Co., 459 F.3d 1044, 1048 (10th Cir. 2006)
- Garrett v. Selby, Connor, Maddux & Janer, 425 F.3d 836, 840 (10th Cir. 2005)
- Jenkins v. Currier, 514 F.3d 1030, 1032 (10th Cir. 2008)
- Smith v. United States, 561 F.3d 1090, 1096 (10th Cir. 2009)
- Margheim v. Buljko, 855 F.3d 1077, 1084 (10th Cir. 2017)
- Watson v. Kansas City, 857 F.2d 690, 694 (10th Cir. 1988)
- Gross v. Samudio, 630 F. App'x 772, 779 (10th Cir. 2015)
- Wittner v. Banner Health, 720 F.3d 770, 777 (10th Cir. 2013)
- Nasious v. Two Unknown B.I.C.E. Agents, 492 F.3d 1158, 1163 (10th Cir. 2007)
- American Manufacturers Mutual Insurance Co. v. Sullivan, 526 U.S. 40, 50 (1999)
- Ambus v. Granite Board of Education, 975 F.2d 1555, 1559 (10th Cir. 1992)
- Will v. Michigan Department of State Police, 491 U.S. 58, 64, 66 (1989)
- Kentucky v. Graham, 473 U.S. 159, 167 (1985)
- Papasan v. Allain, 478 U.S. 265, 276 (1986)
- Edelman v. Jordan, 415 U.S. 651, 663 (1974)
- Quern v. Jordan, 440 U.S. 332, 345 (1979)
- Sutton v. Utah State School for the Deaf & Blind, 173 F.3d 1226, 1233 (10th Cir. 1999)
- Bloomquist v. Utah, No. 2:16-cv-34, 2016 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 141601, at *6 (D. Utah Sept. 16, 2016)
- Tufaro v. Oklahoma ex rel. Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma, 107 F.4th 1121, 1137 (10th Cir. 2024)

