

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
INDIANA, FORT WAYNE DIVISION

Manning v. Barnfield

No. 1:23-CV-421-HAB (N.D. Ind. Apr. 15, 2026) · No. 1:23-CV-421-HAB · Decided April 15, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana dismissed William L. Manning’s case with prejudice for failure to prosecute. The court found that Manning failed to appear at a settlement conference, did not respond to a show-cause order, and failed to provide an updated address after his release from incarceration.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana, Fort Wayne Division
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of Indiana, Fort Wayne Division
DECIDED	April 15, 2026
DOCKET	1:23-CV-421-HAB
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The district court dismissed the action with prejudice sua sponte for failure to prosecute after Plaintiff failed to appear at a court-ordered settlement conference and failed to respond to a subsequent show-cause order.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	A district court may dismiss an action for failure to prosecute under its inherent authority, including sua sponte, but dismissal as a harsh sanction requires a clear record of delay or contumacious conduct or a showing that less drastic sanctions are unavailable.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unreported district court opinion; precedential status not stated

TOPICS

- sanctions
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

- Civil procedure
- Prisoner civil rights

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the district court could dismiss the action sua sponte for failure to prosecute.
2. Whether the record of failure to appear, failure to respond to the show-cause order, failure to maintain current contact information, and failure to advance the case warranted dismissal with prejudice.

HOLDINGS

1. A district court has inherent authority to dismiss an action for failure to prosecute, including on its own motion.
2. Dismissal with prejudice was warranted because Manning failed to prosecute the case after disregarding court orders, failing to appear at the settlement conference, failing to respond to the show-cause order, and taking no steps to advance the litigation.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“This Court “generally ha[s] broad authority to dismiss a case for failure to prosecute.””

“But because dismissal is such a harsh sanction, such an action is only appropriate “when there is a clear record of delay or contumacious conduct, or when other less drastic sanctions have proven unavailable.””

“The demand that plaintiffs provide contact information is no esoteric rule of civil procedure, but rather the obvious minimal requirement for pursuing a lawsuit.”

“The Court orders that this case be DISMISSED WITH PREJUDICE.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Manning failed to appear either in person or by video at a court-ordered settlement conference. He then failed to respond to an order to show cause warning that noncompliance could result in sanctions up to and including dismissal. Although the show-cause order was not delivered because Manning had been released and had not provided a new address, he had also ignored another court order, failed to update his contact information, and took no steps to prosecute the case for months.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The case was referred to a magistrate judge for a settlement conference. Plaintiff failed to appear, was ordered to show cause, and did not respond; mail sent to his former correctional-facility address was returned after his release, and he did not provide updated contact information. The district court dismissed the case with prejudice after noting that discovery had closed, the dispositive-motion deadline had passed, and Plaintiff had taken no further steps to advance the litigation.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Thomas v. Wardell, 951 F.3d 854, 862 (7th Cir. 2020)
- Harrington v. City of Chicago, 433 F.3d 542, 548 (7th Cir. 2006)
- Webber v. Eye Corp., 721 F.2d 1067, 1068 (7th Cir. 1983)
- GCIU Emp. Ret. Fund v. Chi. Trib., 8 F.3d 1195, 1199 (7th Cir. 1993)
- Eleza L. Rodriguez v. Lear Corp., No. 1:24-CV-561-HAB-ALT, 2025 WL 4033400, at *3 n. 2 (N.D. Ind. Oct. 14, 2025)
- Rodriguez v. Lear Corp., No. 1:24-CV-561-HAB-ALT, 2025 WL 3458487 (N.D. Ind. Dec. 2, 2025)

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