

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF OHIO, EASTERN DIVISION

Darlene M. Gustavson v. Steve Patton

Gustavson · No. 1:26-cv-870 · Decided April 15, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of Ohio dismissed Darlene M. Gustavson’s action against a municipal prosecutor under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B). The court concluded that prosecutorial immunity, Younger abstention, and the frivolousness of the plaintiff’s sovereign-citizen-based claims each supported dismissal.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of Ohio, Eastern Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	J. Philip Calabrese
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of Ohio, Eastern Division
DECIDED	April 15, 2026
DOCKET	1:26-cv-870
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff filed a federal constitutional-rights action seeking \$90,000 in damages against a municipal-court prosecutor. After granting Plaintiff leave to proceed in forma pauperis, the district court screened the complaint and dismissed the action under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B).
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court screened the in forma pauperis complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), liberally construed the pro se pleading, accepted factual allegations as true for plausibility purposes, and dismissed claims lacking an arguable basis in law or fact or failing to state a claim.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court opinion; precedential status unknown
PARTIES	Darlene M. Gustavson v. Steve Patton

TOPICS

- section 1983
- civil procedure
- motions to dismiss
- civil rights
- federalism

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

civil rights

constitutional law

federal courts

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the complaint seeking damages from the municipal prosecutor was barred by absolute prosecutorial immunity.
2. Whether Younger abstention required the federal court to defer to ongoing municipal-court proceedings involving traffic, vehicle-registration, and driver's-license matters.
3. Whether the complaint was frivolous or failed to state a claim because it relied on sovereign-citizen legal theories.
4. Whether the action was subject to dismissal under the screening requirements of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B).

HOLDINGS

1. The complaint's damages claim was barred by absolute prosecutorial immunity because the challenged conduct was intimately associated with the prosecutor's actions in the criminal case against Plaintiff.
2. Younger abstention required dismissal because the municipal-court proceedings were ongoing, implicated important state interests, and afforded Plaintiff an adequate opportunity to raise her federal claims.
3. The federal lawsuit was frivolous because it relied on sovereign-citizen theories that have no legal basis.
4. The court was required to dismiss the action under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) because it sought relief from an immune defendant, failed to state a claim, and was frivolous.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“in initiating a prosecution and in presenting the State’s case, the prosecutor is immune from a civil suit for damages under § 1983.” (424 U.S. at 431)

“They rely on made-up concepts that do not have any weight in the governance of human affairs in our country, let alone in actual litigation.” (III. Frivolous Claims)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Police stopped Gustavson on January 1, 2026, because she was driving without a license and registration, and towed her vehicle. A warrant apparently issued, and she spent two days in jail. Ongoing municipal-court proceedings followed, during which she challenged the court's jurisdiction using sovereign-citizen theories and later sued the municipal prosecutor for emotional distress and \$90,000 in damages.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

On April 14, 2026, Plaintiff filed suit in federal court based on events arising from ongoing municipal-court proceedings concerning traffic, licensing, registration, and related charges. The district court granted Plaintiff's

application to proceed in forma pauperis, screened the complaint, and dismissed it because the prosecutor was immune from damages, Younger abstention applied, and the claims based on sovereign-citizen theories were frivolous. The court also certified under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3) that an appeal could not be taken in good faith.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- McGore v. Wrigglesworth, 114 F.3d 601, 608 (6th Cir. 1997)
- LaFountain v. Harry, 716 F.3d 944, 951 (6th Cir. 2013)
- Boag v. MacDougall, 454 U.S. 364, 365 (1978) (per curiam)
- Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972)
- Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 327–28 (1989)
- Lawler v. Marshall, 898 F.2d 1196 (6th Cir. 1990)
- Sistrunk v. City of Strongsville, 99 F.3d 194, 197 (6th Cir. 1996)
- Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25, 32 (1992)
- Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555, 564 (2007)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 677–78 (2009)
- Papasan v. Allain, 478 U.S. 265, 286 (1986)
- Bibbo v. Dean Witter Reynolds, Inc., 151 F.3d 559, 561 (6th Cir. 1998)
- Imbler v. Pachtman, 424 U.S. 409, 430–31 (1976)
- Buckley v. Fitzsimmons, 509 U.S. 259, 273 (1993)
- Burns, 500 U.S. at 494–96
- Younger v. Harris, 401 U.S. 37, 44–45 (1971)
- Watts v. Burkhardt, 854 F.2d 839, 844–48 (6th Cir. 1988)
- Pennzoil Co. v. Texaco, Inc., 481 U.S. 1, 15 (1987)
- Middlesex County Ethics Comm. v. Garden State Bar Ass’n, 457 U.S. 423, 432 (1982)
- United States v. Thomas, 769 F. Supp. 3d 739 (N.D. Ohio 2025)