

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF SOUTH
CAROLINA

Christopher Jermaine McGee v. Sheldon T. Peden

McGee v. Peden · No. C/A No. 6:26-1163-BHH-TER · Decided March 24, 2026

SUMMARY

This Report and Recommendation addresses a pro se § 1983 action brought by a pretrial detainee against the judge in his criminal case. The magistrate judge recommends dismissal with prejudice under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e) and 1915A because the defendant is protected by absolute judicial immunity. The document also provides notice of the parties' right to file objections within fourteen days.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of South Carolina
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Thomas E. Rogers, III
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of South Carolina
DECIDED	March 24, 2026
DOCKET	C/A No. 6:26-1163-BHH-TER
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Report and recommendation addressing a pro se pretrial detainee's in forma pauperis civil-rights complaint before service of process.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Screening under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) and 1915A; the court liberally construes pro se pleadings but may dismiss sua sponte claims that are frivolous, fail to state a claim, or seek relief from an immune defendant.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential

TOPICS

[section 1983](#) [prisoners rights](#) [civil rights](#) [motions to dismiss](#) [civil procedure](#)

PRACTICE AREAS

[civil rights](#) [federal civil procedure](#) [prisoner litigation](#) [judicial immunity](#)

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the complaint stated a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against the judge who presided over the plaintiff's criminal case.
2. Whether absolute judicial immunity barred the claims based on the defendant's judicial acts and rulings.

HOLDINGS

1. The complaint failed to state a claim upon which relief could be granted because it challenged judicial participation and rulings by the defendant without establishing a cognizable violation actionable under § 1983.
2. Absolute judicial immunity barred McGee's claims because they arose from acts taken by Peden in his judicial capacity and there was no allegation that the acts were taken in the complete absence of jurisdiction.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“A judge is absolutely immune from liability for his judicial acts even if his exercise of authority is flawed by the commission of grave procedural errors.” (3)

“The requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the Court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts which set forth a claim currently cognizable in a federal district court.” (2)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

McGee, a pretrial detainee proceeding pro se and in forma pauperis, sued Peden, identified as the judge in McGee's criminal case. McGee challenged official acts and judicial rulings, attached the warrant signed by Peden, and requested transportation for a proper probable-cause hearing outside jail and a lower bond. The complaint sought relief based on Peden's participation in McGee's criminal proceedings.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

McGee filed a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 action against Seldon T. Peden, the judge in McGee's criminal case, seeking transportation for a probable-cause hearing outside jail and a lower bond. The magistrate judge screened the complaint under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e) and 1915A and recommended dismissal with prejudice without issuance and service of process. The parties were advised of their right to object within fourteen days; the text does not state that the district court adopted the recommendation.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25 (1992)
- Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 324-25 (1989)
- Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519 (1972)

- Nasim v. Warden, Md. House of Corr., 64 F.3d 951 (4th Cir. 1995)
- Gordon v. Leeke, 574 F.2d 1147, 1151 (4th Cir. 1978)
- Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007)
- Beaudett v. City of Hampton, 775 F.2d 1274, 1278 (4th Cir. 1985)
- Small v. Endicott, 998 F.2d 411 (7th Cir. 1993)
- Barnett v. Hargett, 174 F.3d 1128 (10th Cir. 1999)
- Weller v. Dep't of Soc. Servs., 901 F.2d 387, 390-91 (4th Cir. 1990)
- Albright v. Oliver, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994)
- City of Monterey v. Del Monte Dunes at Monterey, Ltd., 526 U.S. 687, 707 (1999)
- West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988)
- Siegert v. Gilley, 500 U.S. 226, 232 (1991)
- Mitchell v. Forsyth, 472 U.S. 511, 526 (1985)
- Mireles v. Waco, 502 U.S. 9, 11-12 (1991)
- Stump v. Sparkman, 435 U.S. 349, 359 (1978)
- Pressly v. Gregory, 831 F.2d 514, 517 (4th Cir. 1987)
- Chu v. Griffith, 771 F.2d 79, 81 (4th Cir. 1985)
- Diamond v. Colonial Life & Accident Insurance Co., 416 F.3d 310 (4th Cir. 2005)
- Thomas v. Arn, 474 U.S. 140 (1985)
- Wright v. Collins, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985)
- United States v. Schronce, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984)

OPINION

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA Christopher Jermaine McGee,) C/A No. 6:26-1163-BHH-TER Plaintiff,)) vs.) Report and Recommendation) Seldon T. Peden,) Defendant.) _____) This is a civil action filed by a pretrial detainee, proceeding pro se and in forma pauperis. Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. 636(b)(1) and District of South Carolina Local Civil Rule 73.02(B)(2)(e), the undersigned is authorized to review all pretrial matters in such pro se cases and to submit findings and recommendations to the District Court.

See 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e); 1915A (as soon as possible after docketing, district courts should review prisoner cases to determine whether they are subject to summary dismissal). STANDARD OF REVIEW Under established local procedure in this judicial district, a careful review has been made of Plaintiff's pro se complaint filed in this case. This review has been conducted pursuant to the procedural provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915 and in light of the following precedents: Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25 (1992); Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 324-25 (1989); Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519 (1972); Nasim v. Warden, Md. House of Corr., 64 F.3d 951 (4th Cir.

1995); *Gordon v. Leeke*, 574 F.2d 1147 (4th Cir. 1978). Plaintiff's Complaint has been filed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915, which permits an indigent litigant to commence an action in federal court without prepaying the administrative costs of proceeding with the lawsuit.

To protect against possible abuses of this privilege, the statute allows a district court to dismiss the case upon a finding that the action "fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted," "is frivolous or malicious," or "seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief." 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B). A finding of frivolity can be made where the complaint "lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact." *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. at 31.

Under § 1915(e)(2)(B), a claim based on a meritless legal theory may be dismissed sua sponte. *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319 (1989). This court is required to liberally construe pro se complaints. *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007). Such pro se complaints are held to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys. *Id.*; *Gordon v. Leeke*, 574 F.2d 1147, 1151 (4th Cir.

1978). Even under this less stringent standard, however, the pro se complaint may be subject to summary dismissal. The mandated liberal construction afforded to pro se pleadings means that if the court can reasonably read the pleadings to state a valid claim on which plaintiff could prevail, it should do so, but a district court may not rewrite a complaint to include claims that were never presented, construct the plaintiff's legal arguments for him, or conjure up questions never squarely presented to the court.

Beaudett v. City of Hampton, 775 F.2d 1274, 1278 (4th Cir. 1985); *Small v. Endicott*, 998 F.2d 411 (7th Cir. 1993); *Barnett v. Hargett*, 174 F.3d 1128 (10th Cir. 1999). The requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the Court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts which set forth a claim currently cognizable in a federal district court.

Weller v. Dep't of Soc. Servs., 901 F.2d 387, 390-91 (4th Cir.1990) (The "special judicial solicitude" with which a [court] should view such pro se complaints does not transform the court into an advocate.). DISCUSSION Plaintiff's action is subject to summary dismissal for failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted. Plaintiff brings this action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

Section 1983 "is not itself a source of substantive rights, but merely provides a method for vindicating federal rights elsewhere conferred." *Albright v. Oliver*, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994) (internal quotation and citation omitted). A legal action under § 1983 allows "a party who has been deprived of a federal right under the color of state law to seek relief." *City of Monterey v. Del Monte Dunes at Monterey, Ltd.*, 526 U.S. 687, 707 (1999).

Under § 1983, a plaintiff must establish two essential elements: (1) that a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States was violated, and (2) that the alleged violation "was

committed by a person acting under color of state law.” *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988).

The only Defendant Plaintiff sues is a judge in his criminal case. Plaintiff’s request for relief is transportation for a “proper probable cause hearing... not in a jail” and lower bond. (ECF No. 1 at 8). Plaintiff attaches the warrant signed by Defendant. Plaintiff’s claims against Defendant are based on official participation and resulting judicial rulings made in relation to Plaintiff’s cases.

Such claims are barred by the doctrine of absolute judicial immunity. Judicial immunity is a threshold question which requires summary dismissal. *Siegert v. Gilley*, 500 U.S. 226, 232 (1991); *Mitchell v. Forsyth*, 472 U.S. 511, 526 (1985).

The doctrine of absolute immunity for acts taken by a judge in connection with his or her judicial authority and responsibility is well established and widely recognized. See *Mireles v. Waco*, 502 U.S. 9, 11–12 (1991) (judges are immune from civil suit for actions taken in their judicial capacity, unless “taken in the complete absence of all jurisdiction”); *Stump v. Sparkman*, 435 U.S. 349, 359 (1978) (“A judge is absolutely immune from liability for his judicial acts even if his exercise of authority is flawed by the commission of grave procedural errors.”); *Pressly v. Gregory*, 831 F.2d 514, 517 (4th Cir.1987) (a suit by South Carolina inmate against two Virginia magistrates); *Chu v. Griffith*, 771 F.2d 79, 81 (4th Cir.1985) (“It has long been settled that a judge is absolutely immune from a claim for damages arising out of his judicial 3 actions.”).

Plaintiff has failed to state a claim upon which relief could be granted. RECOMMENDATION It is recommended that the District Court dismiss Plaintiff’s action with prejudice under § 1915(e) and § 1915A and without issuance and service of process. s/Thomas E. Rogers, III March 24, 2026 Thomas E. Rogers, III Florence, South Carolina United States Magistrate Judge Plaintiff’s attention is directed to the important notice on the next page.

4 Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation The parties are advised that they may file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation with the District Judge. Objections must specifically identify the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objections are made and the basis for such objections. “[I]n the absence of a timely filed objection, a district court need not conduct a de novo review, but instead must ‘only satisfy itself that there is no clear error on the face of the record in order to accept the recommendation.’” *Diamond v. Colonial Life & Acc.*

Ins. Co., 416 F.3d 310 (4th Cir. 2005) (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 72 advisory committee’s note). Specific written objections must be filed within fourteen (14) days of the date of service of this Report and Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b); see Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(a), (d). Filing by mail pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 5 may be accomplished by mailing objections to: Robin L. Blume, Clerk United States District Court Post Office Box 2317 Florence, South Carolina 29503 Failure to timely file specific written objections to this Report and

Recommendation will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of the District Court based upon such Recommendation.

28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); *Wright v. Collins*, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985); *United States v. Schronce*, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984). 5