

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
PENNSYLVANIA

Isaiah Best, et al. v. SCI-Phoenix, et al.

Best v. SCI-Phoenix · No. 25-CV-6957 · Decided March 2, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania grants Isaiah Best leave to proceed in forma pauperis and directs payment of the filing fee in installments. The order dismisses Michael James Mark Sinclair as a plaintiff and dismisses several claims and defendants without prejudice, while allowing Best 30 days to amend his complaint or notify the court that he will stand on the original complaint.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Gerald J. Pappert
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania
DECIDED	March 2, 2026
DOCKET	25-CV-6957
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The court ruled on a prisoner-plaintiff's motion to proceed in forma pauperis and screened the complaint, dismissing certain claims and parties without prejudice while allowing Isaiah Best an opportunity to amend.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The order screened the pro se prisoner complaint and dismissed claims under the applicable pleading and jurisdictional standards; the source does not state a separately labeled standard of review.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential
PARTIES	Isaiah Best, et al. v. SCI-Phoenix, et al.

TOPICS

pleadings

subject matter jurisdiction

section 1983

prisoners rights

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Best should be permitted to proceed in forma pauperis and pay the filing fee through installments.
2. Whether Sinclair should remain a named plaintiff after failing to comply with the court's order concerning the filing fee and prisoner-account statement.
3. Whether Best's federal claims for monetary damages against the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, SCI Phoenix, and the United States should be dismissed.
4. Whether Best's federal claims against Superintendent Joseph Terra should be dismissed.
5. Whether Best's state-law negligence claims should be dismissed for lack of subject matter jurisdiction.
6. Whether Best should be afforded leave to amend or an opportunity to stand on the original complaint.

HOLDINGS

1. Best was granted leave to proceed in forma pauperis, but he remains responsible for paying the full \$350 filing fee in installments under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b), regardless of the outcome of the case.
2. Michael James Mark Sinclair was dismissed without prejudice as a named plaintiff because he failed to pay the fees or file a compliant in forma pauperis motion with a certified six-month prisoner-account statement after being given thirty days and warned of dismissal.
3. Best's federal claims seeking monetary damages against the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, SCI Phoenix, and the United States were dismissed without prejudice and without leave to amend.
4. Best's federal claims against Superintendent Joseph Terra were dismissed without prejudice.
5. Best's state-law negligence claims were dismissed without prejudice for lack of subject matter jurisdiction.
6. Best was permitted to file a complete amended complaint within thirty days or file a notice stating that he would stand on the original complaint; failure to respond would be treated as an intent to stand on the complaint and would lead to a final dismissal order.
7. The six-factor test announced in *Poulis* is not applicable to a dismissal based on a plaintiff's decision to stand on the complaint or abandonment that leaves the case without an operative pleading.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Best’s state law claims of negligence are DISMISSED WITHOUT PREJUDICE for lack of subject matter jurisdiction.” (Order ¶ 7)

“The amended complaint shall be a complete document that does not rely on the initial Complaint or other papers filed in this case to state a claim.” (Order ¶ 9)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Isaiah Best, an incarcerated plaintiff at SCI Phoenix, filed a pro se civil-rights complaint seeking relief against Pennsylvania entities, SCI Phoenix, the United States, and Superintendent Joseph Terra, including federal monetary-damages claims and state-law negligence claims. Michael James Mark Sinclair was also named as a plaintiff but failed to pay the filing fee or submit a motion to proceed in forma pauperis with the required six-month prisoner-account statement. The court dismissed specified claims and parties without prejudice and permitted Best to amend.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Isaiah Best filed a pro se prisoner civil-rights complaint and moved to proceed in forma pauperis. The court granted in forma pauperis status, directed payment of the filing fee in installments, deemed the complaint filed, dismissed Michael James Mark Sinclair as a plaintiff for failure to comply with the court's filing-fee and account-statement order, and dismissed specified claims and defendants without prejudice. Best was given thirty days to file an amended complaint or notify the court that he would stand on the original complaint; failure to respond would result in a final dismissal order.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Weber v. McGrogan, 939 F.3d 232, 241 (3d Cir. 2019)
- Borelli v. City of Reading, 532 F.2d 950, 951 n.1 (3d Cir. 1976)
- In re Westinghouse Sec. Litig., 90 F.3d 696, 703-04 (3d Cir. 1996)
- Weber v. McGrogan, 939 F.3d 232, 239-40 (3d Cir. 2019)
- Poulis v. State Farm Fire & Casualty Co., 747 F.2d 863 (3d Cir. 1984)
- Weber v. McGrogan, 939 F.3d 232, 241 & n.11 (3d Cir. 2019)
- Elansari v. Altria, 799 F. App'x 107, 108 n.1 (3d Cir. 2020) (per curiam)
- Dickens v. Danberg, 700 F. App'x 116, 118 (3d Cir. 2017) (per curiam)
- Baker v. Accounts Receivables Mgmt., Inc., 292 F.R.D. 171, 175 (D.N.J. 2013)

OPINION

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA ISAAH BEST, et al.,: Plaintiffs,: v.: CIVIL ACTION NO. 25-CV-6957 SCI-PHOENIX, et al.,: Defendants.: ORDER AND NOW, this 2nd day of March, 2026, upon consideration of Plaintiff Isaiah Best's Motion to Proceed In Forma Pauperis (Dkt. No. 4), Prisoner Trust Fund Account Statement (Dkt.

No. 5), and pro se Complaint (Dkt. No. 1), it is ORDERED that: 1. Leave to proceed in forma pauperis is GRANTED pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915. 2. Isaiah Best, #QP-5795, shall pay the full

filing fee of \$350 in installments, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b), regardless of the outcome of this case.

The Court directs the Superintendent of SCI Phoenix or other appropriate official to assess an initial filing fee of 20% of the greater of (a) the average monthly deposits to Best's inmate account; or (b) the average monthly balance in Best's inmate account for the six-month period immediately preceding the filing of this case.

The Superintendent or other appropriate official shall calculate, collect, and forward the initial payment assessed pursuant to this Order to the Court with a reference to the docket number for this case. In each succeeding month when the amount in Best's inmate trust fund account exceeds \$10.00, the Superintendent or other appropriate official shall forward payments to the Clerk of Court equaling 20% of the preceding month's income credited to Best's inmate account until the fees are paid.

Each payment shall refer to the docket number for this case. 3. The Clerk of Court is DIRECTED to send a copy of this Order to the Superintendent of SCI Phoenix. 4. The Complaint is DEEMED filed. 5. In light of Michael James Mark Sinclair's failure to either pay the fees to commence a civil action or file a motion to proceed in forma pauperis with a certified copy of his six-month prisoner account statement as directed by this Court's Order entered on December 16, 2025 (Dkt.

No. 3) which: (1) granted Sinclair a thirty-day opportunity to do so, and (2) warned him that the failure to comply with the Order would result in the dismissal of his claims without prejudice, Michael James Mark Sinclair is DISMISSED WITHOUT PREJUDICE as a named Plaintiff in this case. 6.

The Clerk of Court is DIRECTED to TERMINATE Michael James Mark Sinclair as a Plaintiff in this case. 7. Best's claims are DISMISSED for the reasons stated in the Court's Memorandum, as follows: a. Best's federal claims seeking monetary damages against the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, SCI Phoenix, and the United States are DISMISSED WITHOUT PREJUDICE and without leave to amend. b. Best's federal claims against Superintendent Joseph Terra are DISMISSED WITHOUT PREJUDICE. c. Best's state law claims of negligence are DISMISSED WITHOUT PREJUDICE for lack of subject matter jurisdiction.

8. The Clerk of Court is DIRECTED to TERMINATE the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, SCI Phoenix, and the United States as Defendants in this case. 9. Best may file an amended complaint within thirty (30) days of the date of this Order. Any amended complaint must identify all defendants in the caption of the amended complaint in addition to identifying them in the body of the amended complaint and shall state the basis for Best's claims against each defendant.

The amended complaint must also provide as much identifying information for the defendants as possible. Best may refer to a defendant by last name only if that is the only identifying information possessed. If Best wishes to name individuals for whom he does not have any identifying information, he may refer to those individuals as John Doe #1, John Doe #2, etc.¹ The amended complaint shall be a complete document that does not rely on the initial Complaint or other papers filed in this case to state a claim.

When drafting his amended complaint, Best should be mindful of the Court's reasons for dismissing the claims in his initial Complaint as explained in the Court's Memorandum. Upon the filing of an amended complaint, the Clerk shall not make service until so ORDERED by the Court.

10.

The Clerk of Court is DIRECTED to send Best a blank copy of the Court's form complaint for a prisoner filing a civil rights action bearing the above civil 1 Without the name of at least one individual or entity, however, the Court may be unable to direct service of any amended complaint that Best may file. action number. Best may use this form to file his amended complaint if he chooses to do so.

11. If Best does not wish to amend his Complaint and instead intends to stand on his Complaint as originally pled, he may file a notice with the Court within thirty (30) days of the date of this Order stating that intent, at which time the Court will issue a final order dismissing the case. Any such notice should be titled "Notice to Stand on Complaint," and shall include the civil action number for this case.

See *Weber v. McGrogan*, 939 F.3d 232, 241 (3d Cir. 2019) ("If the plaintiff does not desire to amend, he may file an appropriate notice with the district court asserting his intent to stand on the complaint, at which time an order to dismiss the action would be appropriate." (quoting *Borelli v. City of Reading*, 532 F.2d 950, 951 n.1 (3d Cir. 1976))); *In re Westinghouse Sec. Litig.*, 90 F.3d 696, 703–04 (3d Cir.

1996) (holding "that the district court did not abuse its discretion when it dismissed with prejudice the otherwise viable claims... following plaintiffs' decision not to replead those claims" when the district court "expressly warned plaintiffs that failure to replead the remaining claims... would result in the dismissal of those claims"). 12. If Best fails to file any response to this Order, the Court will conclude that Best intends to stand on his Complaint and will issue a final order dismissing this case.² See *Weber*, 939 F.3d at 239-40 (explaining that a plaintiff's intent to stand on his 2 The six-factor test announced in *Poulis v. State Farm Fire & Casualty Co.*, 747 F.2d 863 (3d Cir.

1984), is inapplicable to dismissal orders based on a plaintiff's intention to stand on her complaint. See *Weber*, 939 F.3d at 241 & n.11 (treating the "stand on the complaint" doctrine as distinct from

dismissals under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(b) for failure to comply with a court order, which require assessment of the Poulis factors); see also *Elansari v. Altria*, 799 F. App'x 107, 108 n.1 (3d Cir.

2020) (per curiam). Indeed, an analysis under Poulis is not required when a plaintiff willfully abandons the case or makes adjudication impossible, as would be the case when a plaintiff opts not to amend her complaint may be inferred from inaction after issuance of an order directing him to take action to cure a defective complaint). BY THE COURT: /s/ Gerald J. Pappert Gerald J. Pappert, J. complaint, leaving the case without an operative pleading.

See *Dickens v. Danberg*, 700 F. App'x 116, 118 (3d Cir. 2017) (per curiam) (“Where a plaintiff’s conduct clearly indicates that he willfully intends to abandon the case, or where the plaintiff’s behavior is so contumacious as to make adjudication of the case impossible, a balancing of the Poulis factors is not necessary.”); *Baker v. Accounts Receivables Mgmt., Inc.*, 292 F.R.D.

171, 175 (D.N.J. 2013) (“[T]he Court need not engage in an analysis of the six Poulis factors in cases where a party willfully abandons her case or otherwise makes adjudication of the matter impossible.” (citing cases)).