

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

William Rouser v. Julia Gamboa, et al.

Rouser v. Gamboa · No. 2:19-cv-01233-DJC-DMC · Decided September 17, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California adopted the magistrate judge’s findings and recommendations and granted defendants’ motion for summary judgment. The court held that the plaintiff failed to exhaust administrative remedies under the Prison Litigation Reform Act for his deliberate-indifference and retaliation claims. The action was dismissed, and the Clerk was directed to enter judgment and close the case.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Daniel Calabretta
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	September 17, 2025
DOCKET	2:19-cv-01233-DJC-DMC
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff, a state prisoner proceeding pro se under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, objected to a magistrate judge's findings and recommendations concerning defendants' motion for summary judgment based on failure to exhaust administrative remedies under the PLRA.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	De novo review of the magistrate judge's findings and recommendations under 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C) and Local Rule 304(f); summary judgment where there is no genuine dispute of material fact and the legal significance of undisputed facts is at issue.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court order
PARTIES	William Rouser v. Julia Gamboa, et al.

TOPICS

- prisoners rights
- section 1983
- summary judgment
- civil rights
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

prisoner civil rights

civil procedure

administrative exhaustion

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether summary judgment was an appropriate procedure for deciding exhaustion of administrative remedies under the PLRA where no material facts were disputed.
2. Whether grievance SAC HC 18001330 exhausted the First and Fourth Causes of Action for deliberate indifference.
3. Whether the grievance exhausted the Second Cause of Action for retaliation despite not naming the defendants and containing only a brief retaliation allegation.
4. Whether summary judgment could be entered for non-appearing defendants based on plaintiff's failure to exhaust.

HOLDINGS

1. Summary judgment is an appropriate device for resolving exhaustion under the PLRA when the record presents no genuine dispute of material fact and only the legal significance of undisputed facts remains in dispute.
2. The grievance did not exhaust the First or Fourth Causes of Action for deliberate indifference because it preceded the events underlying the First Cause of Action and had no clear connection to the 2017 events underlying the Fourth Cause of Action.
3. The Second Cause of Action was not exhausted because the grievance's single, minimally detailed reference to retaliation did not comply with California's healthcare grievance procedure or otherwise provide sufficient information to alert prison officials to the nature of the alleged wrong.
4. Summary judgment was appropriate for non-appearing defendants Weyer and Montoya because plaintiff's failure to exhaust barred proceeding on the claims against all defendants and plaintiff had a full and fair opportunity to litigate exhaustion.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“nothing in the [PLRA] imposes a ‘name all defendants’ requirement” (at 2)

“alert the prison to the nature of the wrong for which redress is sought and provide sufficient information to allow prison officials to take appropriate responsive measures.” (at 2)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Rouser brought First, Second, and Fourth Causes of Action alleging deliberate indifference and retaliation. He relied principally on healthcare grievance SAC HC 18001330, filed May 23, 2018, which concerned suicidal ideation and alleged deliberate indifference, while the First Cause of Action concerned events on June 5, 2018, and the Fourth Cause of Action concerned events in 2017. The grievance mentioned retaliation only briefly and did not provide sufficient detail to alert prison officials to the nature of the retaliation claim. Two defendants,

Tracy Weyer and Dr. Montoya, had not appeared, but the court concluded that the exhaustion determination applied to all defendants.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The matter was referred to a magistrate judge under 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C) and the Eastern District of California local rules. The magistrate judge issued findings and recommendations on February 5, 2025, and plaintiff timely objected. After conducting de novo review, the district court adopted the findings and recommendations in full, granted defendants' motion for summary judgment, dismissed the action for failure to exhaust administrative remedies, and directed entry of judgment.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Albino v. Baca, 747 F.3d 1162, 1168 (9th Cir. 2014)
- Hill v. Ayala, No. 2:19-cv-0184-TLN-DB, 2021 WL 3403793, at *5 (E.D. Cal. Aug. 4, 2021)
- Jones v. Bock, 549 U.S. 199, 217 (2007)
- Reyes v. Smith, 810 F.3d 654, 658–59 (9th Cir. 2016)
- Columbia Steel Fabricators, Inc. v. Ahlstrom Recovery, 44 F.3d 800, 803 (9th Cir. 1995)
- Gallardo v. Bourne, No. 20-cv-09184-JSW, 2023 WL 3569997, at *12–13 (N.D. Cal. May 19, 2023)