

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Amaeshi Nwozuzu v. Daniel E. Cueva, et al.

Nwozuzu v. Cueva · No. 2:24-cv-01518 SCR P · Decided September 30, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California screened a prisoner’s first amended 42 U.S.C. § 1983 complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A. The court held that the complaint failed to state a cognizable claim because damages were barred against official-capacity defendants and the requested injunctive relief targeted an outdated regulation. The court granted leave to amend within thirty days and directed the plaintiff to clarify the regulation challenged and each defendant’s involvement.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Sean C. Riordan
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	September 30, 2025
DOCKET	2:24-cv-01518 SCR P
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Screening of a state-prisoner civil-rights action under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A after plaintiff filed a first amended complaint.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court screened the complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A and applied the Rule 12(b)(6)-type plausibility standard, accepting well-pleaded allegations as true and construing them in the light most favorable to plaintiff.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential
PARTIES	Amaeshi Nwozuzu v. Daniel E. Cueva, Sircoya M. Williams, Sara Vazquez, Chaim Zaklos, et al.

TOPICS

- section 1983
- prisoners rights
- sovereign immunity
- injunctions
- pleadings

PRACTICE AREAS

prisoner civil rights

constitutional law

federal civil procedure

religious liberty

sovereign immunity

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the first amended complaint stated a cognizable claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 or RLUIPA.
2. Whether plaintiff could recover monetary damages against state officials sued only in their official capacities.
3. Whether plaintiff could pursue prospective injunctive relief against a regulation that had been amended and recodified.
4. Whether plaintiff should receive leave to amend.

HOLDINGS

1. Plaintiff may not proceed with his claims for monetary damages against defendants sued only in their official capacities because those claims are treated as claims against the State and are barred by sovereign immunity.
2. State officials may be sued in their official capacities for prospective injunctive relief under § 1983 and RLUIPA, but plaintiff could not proceed on the claim as pleaded because he challenged an outdated regulation and did not identify what current conduct he sought to enjoin.
3. The first amended complaint failed to state a claim upon which relief may be granted and would not be served.
4. Plaintiff was granted thirty days to file a second amended complaint that identifies the regulation challenged and sufficiently alleges each defendant's involvement and the relief sought.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“the undersigned finds that the FAC fails to state any cognizable claims for relief. Plaintiff will be given leave to file an amended complaint.” (at 1)

“Because neither § 1983 nor RLUIPA abrogate state sovereign immunity, official capacity damage claims like plaintiff’s are barred by the Eleventh Amendment.” (at 7-9)

“A request for injunctive relief does not lie if the plaintiff is no longer subject to the conduct sought to be enjoined.” (at 9-10)

“There can be no liability under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 unless there is some affirmative link or connection between a defendant’s actions and the claimed deprivation.” (at 11)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff was incarcerated at the California Medical Facility and participated or sought to participate in the Religious Meat Alternative program. He alleged that a Jewish chaplain threatened to remove him from the program for six months after a company sent him an item different from the one he ordered, and he attributed the

alleged injury to California Code of Regulations, title 15, § 3054.5. Plaintiff sued the defendants only in their official capacities and sought prospective injunctive relief, costs, and punitive damages.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff, proceeding pro se and in forma pauperis as a state prisoner, filed a § 1983 action and then a first amended complaint against three California prison officials in their official capacities. The court screened the first amended complaint, found that it stated no cognizable claim for relief, declined to serve it, and granted plaintiff thirty days to file a second amended complaint.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325, 327 (1989)
- *Jackson v. Arizona*, 885 F.2d 639, 640 (9th Cir. 1989)
- *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555-57, 570 (2007)
- *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009)
- *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. 89, 93-94 (2007)
- *Scheuer v. Rhodes*, 416 U.S. 232, 236 (1974)
- *Benavidez v. County of San Diego*, 993 F.3d 1134, 1144 (9th Cir. 2021)
- *Monell v. Department of Social Services*, 436 U.S. 658, 694 (1978)
- *Rizzo v. Goode*, 423 U.S. 362, 370-71 (1976)
- *Starr v. Baca*, 652 F.3d 1202, 1207-08 (9th Cir. 2011)
- *Will v. Michigan Department of State Police*, 491 U.S. 58, 71 (1989)
- *Flint v. Dennison*, 488 F.3d 816, 825 (9th Cir. 2007)
- *Holley v. California Department of Corrections*, 599 F.3d 1108, 1114 (9th Cir. 2010)
- *Cornel v. Hawaii*, 37 F.4th 527, 531 (9th Cir. 2022)
- *Mayweathers v. Newland*, 314 F.3d 1062, 1070 (9th Cir. 2002)
- *Boulder Sign Co., LLC v. City of Boulder City, Nevada*, 382 F. Supp. 2d 1190, 1198 (D. Nev. 2005)
- *Arnold v. International Business Machines Corp.*, 637 F.2d 1350, 1355 (9th Cir. 1981)
- *Johnson v. Duffy*, 588 F.2d 740, 743 (9th Cir. 1978)
- *Hyde v. City of Willcox*, 23 F.4th 863, 874 (9th Cir. 2022)
- *Forsyth v. Humana*, 114 F.3d 1467, 1474 (9th Cir. 1997)
- *Loux v. Rhay*, 375 F.2d 55, 57 (9th Cir. 1967)
- *Shakur v. Schriro*, 514 F.3d 878, 884 (9th Cir. 2008)
- *Jones v. Williams*, 791 F.3d 1023, 1031 (9th Cir. 2015)
- *O’Lone v. Estate of Shabazz*, 482 U.S. 342, 348-49 (1987)

- Turner v. Safley, 482 U.S. 78, 89-90 (1987)
- Alvarez v. Hill, 518 F.3d 1152, 1156 (9th Cir. 2008)
- Jones v. Slade, 23 F.4th 1124, 1140 n.3 (9th Cir. 2022)
- Peralta v. Dillard, 744 F.3d 1076, 1082 (9th Cir. 2014)
- Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 834-37, 842 (1994)
- Lemire v. California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation, 726 F.3d 1062, 1074 (9th Cir. 2013)
- Johnson v. Lewis, 217 F.3d 726, 731-32 (9th Cir. 2000)
- Hoptowit v. Ray, 682 F.2d 1237, 1246 (9th Cir. 1982)
- Hudson v. McMillian, 503 U.S. 1, 9 (1992)
- Redman v. County of San Diego, 942 F.2d 1435, 1439 (9th Cir. 1991)

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