

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF
INDIANA, INDIANAPOLIS DIVISION

James E. Brabson, III v. Indiana Department of Correction

Brabson v. Indiana Department of Correction · No. 1:25-cv-01403-JRO-TAB · Decided May 13, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Southern District of Indiana screens James E. Brabson III’s amended 42 U.S.C. § 1983 complaint arising from an alleged inmate stabbing and related prison conduct. The court dismisses claims against the Indiana Department of Correction, the wardens, and a John Doe medical staffer, while allowing Eighth Amendment deliberate-indifference claims against Gaskin and three John Doe officers to proceed. The court directs limited discovery to identify the John Doe defendants and orders service-related proceedings.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Southern District of Indiana, Indianapolis Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Justin R. Olson
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Southern District of Indiana, Indianapolis Division
DECIDED	May 13, 2026
DOCKET	1:25-cv-01403-JRO-TAB
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Screening of a prisoner's amended complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A before service of process.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, the court must dismiss any portion of a prisoner's complaint that is frivolous or malicious, fails to state a claim, or seeks monetary relief from an immune defendant. The court applies the Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6) plausibility standard, accepts well-pleaded factual allegations as true, disregards legal conclusions, and construes pro se pleadings liberally.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court screening order; persuasive rather than precedential
PARTIES	James E. Brabson, III v. Indiana Department of Correction

TOPICS

section 1983

prisoners rights

sovereign immunity

subject matter jurisdiction

service of process

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights

prisoner litigation

federal civil procedure

constitutional law

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the amended complaint stated claims against the Indiana Department of Correction notwithstanding Eleventh Amendment sovereign immunity.
2. Whether the allegations stated Eighth Amendment deliberate-indifference claims against the wardens based solely on their alleged failure to intervene in a housing decision.
3. Whether the allegations stated an Eighth Amendment deliberate-indifference claim against the John Doe medical staffer.
4. Whether the allegations stated Eighth Amendment deliberate-indifference claims against Gaskin and three John Doe correctional officers sufficient to permit limited discovery and further proceedings.
5. Whether the court should permit amendment to identify the John Doe defendants and direct service-related proceedings.

HOLDINGS

1. Claims against the Indiana Department of Correction are barred by the Eleventh Amendment and also fail to state a claim under § 1983 because Congress did not abrogate the state's sovereign immunity for such claims.
2. The amended complaint failed to state Eighth Amendment claims against Warden Wilson and Warden Emerson because it alleged only that they failed to intervene in a subordinate's decision to return the assailant to general population, without alleging personal constitutional culpability.
3. The amended complaint failed to state an Eighth Amendment deliberate-indifference claim against the John Doe medical staffer because it did not allege that the staffer knew of and consciously disregarded Brabson's continued bleeding or otherwise acted with subjective indifference.
4. The amended complaint plausibly stated Eighth Amendment deliberate-indifference claims against Gaskin and the John Doe dormitory officer, sergeant, and lieutenant, permitting those claims to proceed.
5. The court permitted limited discovery to identify the three John Doe officers and required Brabson to amend his complaint within ninety days to substitute or add named defendants, subject to Rule 4(m)'s service requirements.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“When screening a complaint, the Court must dismiss any portion that is frivolous or malicious, fails to state a claim for relief, or seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief.” (Screening Standard)

“The claims that shall proceed are the following: Eighth Amendment deliberate indifference claims against Mr. Gaskin and the three “John Doe” officers.” (Discussion of Claims)

“Brabson still must comply with Fed. R. Civ. P. 4(m), which generally requires the Court to dismiss claims against a defendant without prejudice if service on that defendant is not completed within ninety days after the complaint is filed.” (Discussion of Claims)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Brabson, a prisoner at Plainfield Correctional Facility, alleged that a relationship with a prison staff member led to the staff member's termination and Brabson's placement in segregation. He alleged that an internal-affairs investigator disclosed information about his reports to staff and inmates, placing him at risk. In April 2025, another inmate stabbed Brabson four times and cut him three times; a dormitory officer allegedly failed to conduct mandatory hourly rounds, and responding officers arrived approximately one and one-half hours later. Brabson also alleged that medical personnel stitched his wounds but that he continued bleeding while being escorted to restricted housing.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Brabson filed a civil-rights action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against the Indiana Department of Correction. The initial complaint was dismissed for failure to state a claim. After Brabson filed an amended complaint against additional defendants, the court screened the amended complaint, dismissed claims against the Department, the wardens, and a John Doe medical staffer, and allowed deliberate-indifference claims against Gaskin and three John Doe correctional officers to proceed. The court also directed limited discovery and service-related proceedings to identify the John Doe defendants.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Schillinger v. Kiley, 954 F.3d 990, 993 (7th Cir. 2020)
- Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009)
- Cesal v. Moats, 851 F.3d 714, 720 (7th Cir. 2017)
- de Lima Silva v. Department of Corr., 917 F.3d 546, 565 (7th Cir. 2019)
- Joseph v. Board of Regents of Univ. of Wis. Sys., 432 F.3d 746, 748 (7th Cir. 2005)
- Thomas v. Illinois, 697 F.3d 612, 613 (7th Cir. 2012)
- John Doe v. Purdue University, Doe v. Purdue Univ., 928 F.3d 652, 664 (7th Cir. 2019)
- Zentmyer v. Kendall Cnty., Ill., 220 F.3d 805, 812 (7th Cir. 2000)
- Vance v. Rumsfeld, 701 F.3d 193, 203 (7th Cir. 2012) (en banc)
- Estate of Miller by Chassie v. Marberry, 847 F.3d 425, 428 (7th Cir. 2017)

- Thomas v. Blackard, 2 F.4th 716, 721-22 (7th Cir. 2021)
- Johnson v. Dominguez, 5 F.4th 818, 824 (7th Cir. 2021)
- Whiting v. Wexford Health Sources, Inc., 839 F.3d 658, 662 (7th Cir. 2016)
- Larry v. Goldsmith, 799 F. App'x 413, 416 (7th Cir. 2016)
- Clancy v. Office of Foreign Assets Control of U.S. Dep't of Treasury, 559 F.3d 595, 606-07 (7th Cir. 2009)
- Rodriguez v. McCloughen, 49 F.4th 1120, 1121 (7th Cir. 2022)
- Kennington v. Carter, 216 F. Supp. 2d 856, 857 (S.D. Ind. 2002)

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