

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Becker v. Sherman

Becker · No. 1:16-cv-000828-JLT-HBK · Decided August 13, 2025

SUMMARY

The court recommends denying Plaintiff Joseph Becker’s motion to reopen a closed civil rights action to pursue alleged breaches of a settlement agreement. It concludes that the dismissal order did not retain federal jurisdiction or incorporate the settlement agreement, so enforcement must generally be pursued in state court. The court also determines that relief under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 60(b)(6) is unavailable because Plaintiff did not show a timely motion or extraordinary circumstances.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Helena M. Barch-Kuchta
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	August 13, 2025
DOCKET	1:16-cv-000828-JLT-HBK
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff moved to reopen a closed prisoner civil-rights action to pursue alleged breaches of a settlement agreement. The magistrate judge issued findings and recommendations recommending denial of the motion.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	A motion under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 60(b)(6) must be brought within a reasonable time, and relief requires extraordinary circumstances. A court lacks subject-matter jurisdiction to enforce a settlement agreement after dismissal unless jurisdiction was expressly retained or the agreement was incorporated into the dismissal order.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential
PARTIES	Joseph Becker v. Warden Sherman, et al.

TOPICS

- subject matter jurisdiction
- breach of contract
- civil procedure
- remedies

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

contracts

prisoner civil rights

remedies

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the court retained subject-matter jurisdiction to enforce an alleged settlement agreement after dismissing the action with prejudice without expressly retaining jurisdiction or incorporating the agreement into the dismissal order.
2. Whether Plaintiff was entitled to reopen the closed action under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 60(b)(6) based on alleged repudiation or breach of the settlement agreement.

HOLDINGS

1. The court lacked federal subject-matter jurisdiction to enforce the alleged settlement agreement because the dismissal order did not expressly retain jurisdiction and neither the stipulation nor the order incorporated the settlement agreement.
2. Plaintiff was not entitled to reopen the case under Rule 60(b)(6) because the motion was not shown to have been brought within a reasonable time and Plaintiff did not establish extraordinary circumstances warranting relief.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Enforcement of [a] settlement agreement . . . whether through award of damages or decree of specific performance, is more than just a continuation or renewal of the dismissed suit, and hence requires its own basis for jurisdiction.” (at 2)

“In the usual course upon repudiation of a settlement agreement, the frustrated party may sue anew for breach of the agreement and may not ... reopen the underlying litigation after dismissal.” (at 2)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Joseph Becker, a state prisoner, alleged that defendants repeatedly breached a settlement reached in his civil-rights action. During a 2020 settlement conference, the material settlement terms were placed on the record, but the magistrate judge stated that the terms would be binding only after being reduced to writing and signed. The action was dismissed with prejudice pursuant to the parties' stipulation, which neither referenced a settlement agreement nor reserved federal jurisdiction, and no settlement agreement was filed with or incorporated into the dismissal order.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The parties reached settlement terms during a 2020 settlement conference, but the material terms were to be reduced to writing and signed before becoming binding. The action was later voluntarily dismissed with prejudice under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(a)(1)(A)(ii), without a settlement agreement being filed, incorporated, or an express reservation of federal jurisdiction. Plaintiff later alleged repeated breaches and sought to reopen the case; the court recommended denying the request, subject to review by the assigned district judge.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Gunn v. Minton, 568 U.S. 251, 256 (2013)
- Stevedoring Services of America, Inc. v. Eggert, 953 F.2d 552, 554 (9th Cir. 1992)
- Kokkonen v. Guardian Life Insurance Co. of America, 511 U.S. 375, 378, 380-81 (1994)
- Hajro v. United States Citizenship & Immigration Services, 811 F.3d 1086, 1099 (9th Cir. 2016)
- Harry v. Perkins, 735 Fed. Appx. 296, 297 (9th Cir. 2018)
- United States v. Sparks, 685 F.2d 1128, 1129 (9th Cir. 1982)
- Keeling v. Sheet Metal Workers International Association, Local Union 162, 937 F.2d 408, 410 (9th Cir. 1991)
- Kelly v. Wengler, 822 F.3d 1085, 1095 (9th Cir. 2016)
- Kang v. Harrison, 789 Fed. Appx. 68, 69 (9th Cir. 2019)
- Gonzalez v. Crosby, 545 U.S. 524, 535 (2005)
- Hal v. Haws, 861 F.3d 977, 987-88 (9th Cir. 2017)
- Wilkerson v. Wheeler, 772 F.3d 834, 839 (9th Cir. 2014)

OPINION

(PC) Becker v. Sherman

PER CURIAM.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

9 EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

10 11 JOSEPH BECKER, Case No. 1:16-cv-000828-JLT-HBK (PC) 12 Plaintiff,

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO

13 v. DENY PLAINTIFF’S MOTION

14 WARDEN SHERMAN, et al., (Doc. No. 163) 15 Defendants. FOURTEEN-DAY OBJECTION
PERIOD 16 17 18 On June 20, 2025, Plaintiff, a state prisoner, filed a letter addressed to the Clerk
claiming 19 that the settlement reached in the above case “way back in 2020” is “being repeatedly
breached 20 by defendants.” (Doc. No. 163). Plaintiff states he has reached out to his previous
counsel but 21 has counsel has not contacted him back and he seeks the court’s “Help!” (Id.).1 The
Court 22 construes the letter as motion to reopen this closed case so that Plaintiff may pursue a
claim for 23 breach of the settlement agreement entered into by the parties.

24 PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND

25 A review of this docket reveals that the Court appointed counsel to represent Plaintiff in 26 1
Plaintiff attaches to his letter a copy of the Tuolumne County’s Superior Court’s February 1, 2024

order 27 directing an informal response to Petitioner's state habeas corpus petition alleging a breach of the settlement agreement. (Doc. No. 163 at 2-3). The letter does not refer to or explain the significance of 28 this state court order. 1 this civil rights action. (Doc. No. 22). Plaintiff was represented throughout these proceedings by 2 various counsel from Lathan & Watkins, LLP. (See generally docket). On April 23, 2020, at a 3 telephonic settlement conference held before United States Magistrate Judge Erica P. Grosjean, 4 the Parties reached a settlement of this action. (Doc. No. 156). The materials terms agreed to at 5 the settlement were placed on the record but the magistrate judge noted that the "material terms" 6 would "be reduced to writing and once the terms have been reduced to writing and signed, that 7 will be the binding document." (Doc. No. 158 at 4-5). The Court takes judicial notice of the 8 docket and pleadings in this case, which reflect that a settlement agreement was not filed with the 9 court in that action. Further, the "Stipulation for Voluntary Dismissal With Prejudice" filed on 10 June 19, 2020 in this action does not reference any settlement agreement. (Doc. No. 161). The 11 Stipulation states only that Plaintiff and Defendants "have resolved this case in its entirety." (Id.). 12 The June 22, 2020 Order dismissing this action with prejudice specifies that the action was 13 dismissed pursuant to the stipulation of the Parties in accordance with Fed. R. Civ. P. 14 41(a)(1)(A)(ii) and it did not reference a settlement agreement. (Doc. No. 162).

15 APPLICABLE LAW

16 "Federal courts are courts of limited jurisdiction, possessing only that power authorized by 17 Constitution and statute." *Gunn v. Minton*, 568 U.S. 251, 256 (2013) (internal quotation marks 18 omitted). "A federal court is presumed to lack jurisdiction in a particular case unless the contrary 19 affirmatively appears." *Stevedoring Servs. of Am. Inc. v. Eggert*, 953 F.2d 552, 554 (9th Cir. 20 1992). A claim that a settlement agreement that resulted in the dismissal of case was breached by 21 a party does not give rise to federal jurisdiction in a subsequent federal action. *Kokkonen v. 22 Guardian Life Ins. Co. of Am.*, 511 U.S. 375, 380-81 (1994) (an agreement that is part of the 23 dismissal of a case in federal court "is not a sufficient basis for a federal court's jurisdiction"); 24 *Hajro v. United States Citizenship & Immigration Servs.*, 811 F.3d 1086, 1099 (9th Cir. 2016) (a 25 "district court does not have the inherent power to enforce the terms of a settlement agreement 26 under the doctrine of ancillary jurisdiction"); *Harry v. Perkins*, 735 Fed. Appx. 296, 297 (9th Cir. 27 2018) (an alleged breach of the terms of a private settlement agreement against prison officials, 28 absent more, is not enforceable in federal court). In general, "[e]nforcement of [a] settlement 1 agreement . . . whether through award of damages or decree of specific performance, is more 2 than just a continuation or renewal of the dismissed suit, and hence requires its own basis for 3 jurisdiction." *Kokkonen*, 511 U.S. at 378. 4 Alternatively, under Rule 60(b)(6), a district court may relieve a party "from a final 5 judgment, order, or proceeding for ... any ... reason justifying relief from the operation of the 6 judgment." However, only "extraordinary circumstances" justify relief under the rule. *United 7 States v. Sparks*, 685 F.2d 1128, 1129 (9th Cir.1982). The Ninth Circuit has agreed with its sister 8 circuit that "[r]epudiation

of a settlement agreement that terminated litigation pending before a 9 court constitutes an extraordinary circumstance, and it justifies vacating the court's prior dismissal 10 order. “ Keeling v. Sheet Metal Workers Int'l Ass'n, Loc. Union 162, 937 F.2d 408, 410 (9th Cir. 11 1991) (Collecting cases). A court must find that events leading to settlement agreement's 12 repudiation were “sufficiently extraordinary” to reopen a case. *Id.* (finding that based on “specific 13 acts,” the repudiation was “perceived as bad faith noncompliance”). However, repudiation alone 14 is not an extraordinary circumstance warranting relief under Rule 60(b)(6). See *id.* at 410. Indeed, 15 “[i]n the usual course upon repudiation of a settlement agreement, the frustrated party may sue 16 anew for breach of the agreement and may not ... reopen the underlying litigation after dismissal.” 17 *Id.*

18 ANALYSIS

19 Here, the Court takes judicial notice of its own records which reflect that the dismissal 20 stipulated to by the Parties did not contain an explicit retention of federal jurisdiction and a 21 settlement agreement was not incorporated into the parties' stipulation for dismissal or the district 22 court's order dismissing that action. See, e.g., *Kelly v. Wengler*, 822 F.3d 1085, 1095 (9th Cir. 23 2016) (the stipulation for dismissal explicitly incorporated the parties' settlement agreement, the 24 settlement agreement was attached as an exhibit to the stipulation, and in the agreement “the 25 parties agreed the district court would retain ancillary jurisdiction to enforce the agreement”); 26 *Kokkonen*, 511 U.S. at 381; *Kang v. Harrison*, 789 Fed. Appx. 68, 69 (9th Cir. 2019) (where a 27 district court's dismissal order contained an explicit provision retaining jurisdiction to enforce a 28 settlement agreement, the provision was sufficient to confer subject matter jurisdiction upon that 1 district court to enforce the parties' settlement agreement). 2 Because the order dismissing this case dismissed the action with prejudice without 3 retention of federal jurisdiction, federal jurisdiction over this action terminated upon the Court's 4 dismissal of this action. Accordingly, Plaintiff's allegations that the Defendants have 5 “repeatedly” breached the Settlement Agreement in this action must be raised in state court. See 6 18 U.S.C. § 3626(c)(2). 7 Alternatively, even if the Court construes the motion as brought under Federal Rule of 8 Civil Procedure 60(b)(6), the motion must be brought “within a reasonable time.” *Gonzalez v. 9 Crosby*, 545 U.S. 524, 535 (2005). What constitutes a “reasonable time” is a fact-intensive 10 inquiry. *Hal v. Haws*, 861 F. 3d 977, 987-88 (9th Cir. 2017). Plaintiff provides no facts or 11 explanation as to why he waited to bring this action when he alleges repeated breaches by 12 Defendants. Nor does Plaintiff aver any facts from which this Court could infer any 13 extraordinary circumstances to find repudiation. Notably, Plaintiff is not without recourse as he 14 may file an action in state court should he wish to bring an action against defendants for any 15 alleged breach of the settlement agreement. 16 Accordingly, it is RECOMMENDED: 17 Plaintiff's motion to reopen this case for breach of settlement agreement (Doc. No. 163) is 18 DENIED.

19 NOTICE TO PARTIES

20 These Findings and Recommendations will be submitted to the United States District 21 Judge assigned to this case, pursuant to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1). Within 14 days 22 after

being served with a copy of these Findings and Recommendations, a party may file written 23 objections with the Court. Id.; Local Rule 304(b). The document should be captioned, 24 “Objections to Magistrate Judge’s Findings and Recommendations” and shall not exceed fifteen 25 (15) pages. The Court will not consider exhibits attached to the Objections. To the extent a party 26 wishes to refer to any exhibit(s), the party should reference the exhibit in the record by its 27 CM/ECF document and page number, when possible, or otherwise reference the exhibit with 28 specificity. Any pages filed in excess of the fifteen (15) page limitation may be disregarded by 1 | the District Judge when reviewing these Findings and Recommendations under 28 U.S.C. § 2 | 636(b)(1)(C). A party’s failure to file any objections within the specified time may result in the 3 | waiver of certain rights on appeal. Wilkerson v. Wheeler, 772 F.3d 834, 839 (9th Cir. 2014). 4 > | Dated: _ August 13, 2025 Wiha Th fares Hack

6 HELENA M. BARCH-KUCHTA

4 UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

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