

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF WISCONSIN

ROGER GODWIN and JEREMY SMITH,

Petitioners,

v.

LT. WEINSSTANLEY and
OFFICER ALLDEWS,

Respondents.

ORDER

04-C-837-C

This is a civil action brought by two petitioners presently confined at the Columbia Correctional Institution in Portage, Wisconsin, alleging a violation of their federal constitutional rights.

In Lindell v. Litscher, 212 F. Supp. 2d 936 (W.D. Wis. 2002), I ruled that I would not allow prisoners proceeding pro se to prosecute a group complaint in this court because of the many problems inherent in administering such cases. First, there is no guarantee that prisoners who bring joint lawsuits will remain in contact with each other for the length of time it takes a lawsuit to reach resolution. Prisoners are subject to administrative and disciplinary transfers from one institution to another and may be moved regularly within an

institution from one cell block to another and to administrative and punitive segregation status. They have limited freedom, if any, to meet with co-plaintiffs to discuss strategy for a combined lawsuit or to draft documents jointly for filing in a case.

Second, all too often one inmate takes charge of the multi-plaintiff lawsuit and obtains the agreement of other inmates to act on their behalf in prosecuting the joint lawsuit although he lacks the legal authority to do so. There is no way for the court to insure that each co-plaintiff is receiving the information he needs before agreeing to the strategic decisions being made in the case.

Third, Fed. R. Civ. P. 11 requires any person who files a lawsuit to certify by his signature that to the best of the signer's knowledge, information and belief formed after reasonable inquiry, the allegations of the complaint are well grounded in fact and the lawsuit is warranted by existing law or a good faith argument for the extension, modification or reversal of existing law and that the filing of the complaint is not interposed for any improper purpose, such as to harass or cause unnecessary delay or needlessly increase the cost of litigation. Although both of the co-petitioners in this case have signed their names to the last page of the complaint, it is not clear whether each petitioner saw and read the entire complaint he was signing.

Fourth, for the pro se litigant who lets another inmate prosecute a joint action on his behalf, there is significant potential for adverse consequences. Under the 1996 Prison

Litigation Reform Act, prisoners who file claims that lack legal merit or who sue defendants who are immune from suit are subject to the three-strike provision in 28 U.S.C. § 1915. In some instances, courts impose other sanctions on persons who bring lawsuits that lack merit. A pro se litigant who lets another inmate file a joint complaint for him may find himself denied the opportunity to file suits without prior payment of the full filing fee or subjected to monetary sanctions.

Finally, to the extent that a pro se prisoner litigant wishes to recover money damages for alleged unconstitutional practices or conditions, it does not help him to file his suit along with other prisoners. Each prisoner litigant claiming damages is required to prove his own damages independently. Joint filings concerning individual claims of injury only raise the costs of litigating the case and needlessly complicate its management.

Accordingly, I will dismiss petitioners' complaint without prejudice to each petitioner's filing his own separate lawsuit.

ORDER

IT IS ORDERED that this case is DISMISSED without prejudice to each petitioner's

refiling the claims in his own lawsuit separate from this one.

Entered this 10th day of November, 2004.

BY THE COURT:

BARBARA B. CRABB
District Judge