

NONPRECEDENTIAL DISPOSITION
To be cited only in accordance with FED. R. APP. P. 32.1

United States Court of Appeals
For the Seventh Circuit
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Submitted February 8, 2024*

Decided February 14, 2024

Before

FRANK H. EASTERBROOK, *Circuit Judge*

MICHAEL B. BRENNAN, *Circuit Judge*

CANDACE JACKSON-AKIWUMI, *Circuit Judge*

No. 23-1839

YASHIYAH MIKA'AL YASHAR'AL
and ACHASHVEROSH ADNAH
AMMIYHUWD NGOLA MBANDI,
Plaintiffs-Appellants,

v.

CITY OF INDIANAPOLIS, et al.,
Defendants-Appellees.

Appeal from the United States District
Court for the Southern District of
Indiana, Indianapolis Division.

No. 1:20-cv-02988-SEB-MPB

Sarah Evans Barker,
Judge.

* We have agreed to decide the case without oral argument because the briefs and record adequately present the facts and legal arguments, and oral argument would not significantly aid the court. FED. R. APP. P. 34(a)(2)(C).

ORDER

Yashiyah Mika'al Yashar'al and Achashverosh Adnah Ammiyhuwd Ngola Mbandi appeal the dismissal of their case for failure to comply with the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure and to state a claim. The district court correctly identified the deficiencies in his complaint, so we affirm.

Yashar'al alleges that he was driving in Indianapolis when police stopped him for driving without a state-authorized license plate and had his car towed and impounded. He calls himself a "Hebrew Israelite, dual American National Republic" and believes that he is entitled to use his own fictitious license plate, designating that he is a "diplomat" from his fictitious republic, on his car. Yashar'al sued the City of Indianapolis, its police officers, and the towing company and its officers for stopping and seizing the car. In his view, the defendants violated his right to national "self-determination" and his rights under the Constitution, federal law, international treaties, and state law.

Several defendants struggled to understand the complaint. They asked the district court to screen it, *see* 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), and the court dismissed it for two reasons. First the complaint, the court observed, was "nearly unintelligible," "lengthy" (it was 29 pages), and "replete with references to inapplicable biblical law." It therefore violated Rule 8(a)'s requirement that a plaintiff plead "a short and plain statement" showing he is entitled to relief. *See* FED. R. CIV. P. 8(a)(2). Second, to the extent that the claims asserted a constitutional or federal right to drive without a state-issued license plate, no such right existed. The court granted leave to amend the complaint and warned that if the amendment failed to address the errors the court identified, it would dismiss the suit with prejudice.

The amended complaint failed to address the court's concerns, and the court dismissed it with prejudice. The court noted that the amended complaint doubled the length of the initial one, packed in more references to inapplicable biblical law and treaties, and still failed to allege that the defendants violated any enforceable right. The court also declined to exercise supplemental jurisdiction over state law claims, *see* 28 U.S.C. § 1367(c), and denied a motion to reconsider, *see* FED. R. CIV. P. 59(e).

We review the dismissal of a complaint under § 1915(e)(2)(B) de novo, *see Otis v. Demarasse*, 886 F.3d 639, 644 (7th Cir. 2018). On appeal, Yashar'al contests the validity of the dismissal.

Before addressing Yashar'al's appeal, we first note that another person—Achashverosh Adnah Ammiyhuwd Ngola Mbandi—joined the complaint as a putative plaintiff and also seeks to appeal. But Mbandi has no standing to sue the defendants. He supports Yashar'al's claim, but he does not allege that he has an ownership interest in the car, was an occupant of it when it was stopped, was charged with a crime, or has suffered any concrete injury. Without an alleged injury, the district court had no jurisdiction over his purported claim. *See Lujan v. Defenders of Wildlife*, 504 U.S. 555, 560–61 (1992).

With regard to Yashar'al, the district court properly screened the suit under § 1915(e) and dismissed it. First, courts may screen suits for dismissal, even if (as here) the plaintiff has paid the filing fee. *See Gay v. Chandra*, 682 F.3d 590, 595 (7th Cir. 2012) (citing *Hoskins v. Poelstra*, 320 F.3d 761, 763 (7th Cir. 2003)). Second, the amended complaint did not state a claim. As the district court pointed out, driving with an unauthorized license plate is a class C infraction in Indiana, *see* Ind. Code § 9-18.1-4-5, and vehicles that violate the code “may not be used or operated on a highway.” *Id.* Yashar'al supplies no valid authority for his view that this law violates constitutional, statutory, or treaty obligations. Because Yashar'al was driving with an illegal license plate, the stop and seizure of the car was reasonable and constitutional. *See Whren v. United States*, 517 U.S. 806, 810 (1996). Third, the district court had discretion to rule that the amended complaint, which remained largely unintelligible despite Yashar'al's chance to cure that defect, did not comply with Rule 8's norm of a short and plain statement. *See Stanard v. Nygren*, 658 F.3d 792, 796–97 (7th Cir. 2011). “To form a defense, a defendant must know what he is defending against; that is, he must know the legal wrongs he is alleged to have committed.” *Stanard*, 658 F.3d at 799. The court reasonably ruled that defendants could not do so.

We pause to observe that a state cannot compel a person to display a state-sponsored ideological message on its required license plates. *See Wooley v. Maynard*, 430 U.S. 705, 713–715 (1977) (state law punishing driver who covered the state-sponsored message “Live Free or Die” on license plate violated driver's free-speech rights); *see also Walker v. Texas Div., Sons of Confederate Veterans, Inc.*, 576 U.S. 200, 219 (2015) (reaffirming principle of *Wooley*). But Yashar'al does not seek to cover up an

ideological, state-sponsored message on a state-issued license plate; he seeks to use his own fictitious plate in lieu of the required license plate.

Finally, Yashar'al contends that the dismissal of his suit is flawed because the district court failed to address his right under the United Nations Charter to be recognized as a diplomat from the Hebrew Israelite Kingdom/Nation. But his claimed status as a diplomat is irrelevant. Even diplomats from internationally recognized countries must drive with required license plates. *See, e.g.*, U.S. DEP'T OF STATE, NOTICE: DRIVER'S LICENSE REQUIREMENT FOR VEHICLE REGISTRATIONS (2022), <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/2022-09-06-Notice-Drivers-License-Requirements-for-Vehicle-Registration.pdf>.

We have reviewed Yashar'al's remaining arguments, but he has not developed them sufficiently to warrant further discussion. The district court's judgment regarding Yashar'al is AFFIRMED and regarding Mbandi it is modified to reflect that his claim is dismissed for lack of jurisdiction.