

**NONPRECEDENTIAL DISPOSITION**  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 9, 2024

**Before**

FRANK H. EASTERBROOK, *Circuit Judge*

MICHAEL B. BRENNAN, *Circuit Judge*

CANDACE JACKSON-AKIWUMI, *Circuit Judge*

No. 23-2307

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,  
*Plaintiff-Appellee,*

*v.*

JAMES D. LUEDTKE,  
*Defendant-Appellant.*

Appeal from the United States District  
Court for the Eastern District of  
Wisconsin.

No. 03-CR-37

William C. Griesbach,  
*Judge.*

**ORDER**

James Luedtke appeals the denial of his motion for compassionate release, 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(1)(A), and the denial of his motions for recusal and counsel. He is serving a 37-year sentence after pleading guilty to multiple firearm offenses and armed

---

\* 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).

robbery in 2004. *See* 18 U.S.C. §§ 922(a)(6), (g)(1); 2113(a), (d). Because the district court did not abuse its discretion in denying Luedtke’s motions, we affirm.<sup>1</sup>

Luedtke unsuccessfully moved for compassionate release in 2020, about halfway through his prison term. As relevant to this appeal, he asserted that he suffers from circulatory diseases and needs an operation—which he has not yet received—to remove a blood filter. He further argued that the court should release him to receive what he says is medically necessary gender-affirming care. Finally, he asserted that his experience in a maximum-security prison, fears of attack, and lack of gender-affirming care have caused symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental suffering. Separately, Luedtke asked the judge to recuse himself and to appoint him counsel to help with his motion. The district court ruled that Luedtke had not exhausted his administrative remedies with a proper request to his warden for compassionate release, he had not shown that the judge was biased, and he had not adequately justified his request for the appointment of counsel. Luedtke did not appeal.

Two years later, Luedtke filed another motion for compassionate release, the subject of this appeal. He renewed many of the same grounds for relief, including his fear of attacks. He also alleged new medical issues: carpal tunnel syndrome and early-onset Alzheimer’s disease, and further, he argued that prison officials failed to administer properly his drugs (for high cholesterol and mental illness) and to mitigate his risk of contracting COVID-19. He again moved for recusal and counsel. In denying his motions, the court explained that Luedtke failed to substantiate the health problems and risks he asserted, and he could have done so by requesting his medical records through the Bureau of Prisons. Also, the district court found, because his filings were coherent, Luedtke undermined his claim that he had significant cognitive impairments. Next, the court observed, Luedtke’s fear of attacks was not a basis for relief under the compassionate-release statute. The district court also alternatively concluded that, given the seriousness of his offenses and his long criminal history, early release conflicted with the goals of punishment, deterrence, and public safety. *See* 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a). Finally, the court ruled that Luedtke still lacked evidence of the judge’s bias and that, because the motion for release was legally straightforward and he was able to request the medical evidence needed to support it, he could litigate the motion without counsel.

---

<sup>1</sup> Luedtke’s pronoun preferences are unclear—he switches between he/him and she/her, but generally refers to himself as “appellant.” For consistency with the district court’s order—which used he/him pronouns—we continue to use those pronouns here.

On appeal, Luedtke first argues that the district court wrongfully denied his motion to appoint counsel. But Luedtke has no constitutional right to appointed counsel when seeking a sentence reduction under § 3582(c), *see United States v. Blake*, 986 F.3d 756, 758 (7th Cir. 2021), and we review the district court’s decision not to enlist counsel for an abuse of discretion. *See Mejia v. Pfister*, 988 F.3d 415, 418 (7th Cir. 2021) (citing *Pruitt v. Mote*, 503 F.3d 647, 658 (7th Cir. 2007)); *see also* 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(1). The court did not abuse its discretion here: It reasonably concluded that Luedtke’s motion for compassionate release did not raise any novel legal issues and that, based on Luedtke’s access to his own medical records, he could litigate the grounds he raised himself.

Next, Luedtke contends that the district judge should have recused himself for bias under 28 U.S.C. § 455. But Luedtke cites no evidence that the district judge had a disqualifying bias requiring recusal. Instead, he launches unsubstantiated conspiratorial accusations that the judge is “very hungry to kill [him]” and “bent on seeing [him] dead.” These unsupported conspiracy theories do not cause a reasonable, well-informed observer to question the judge’s impartiality. *See United States v. Barr*, 960 F.3d 906, 919–20 (7th Cir. 2020). Luedtke also mentions that the judge imposed a significant sentence and previously denied his motion for compassionate release. But adverse litigation decisions are not, without more, grounds for recusal. *See Liteky v. United States*, 510 U.S. 540, 555 (1994); *Thomas v. Dart*, 39 F.4th 835, 844 (7th Cir. 2022).

Finally, Luedtke argues that the district court failed to discuss every medical issue that he mentioned in his motion for compassionate release. But judges need not respond to every argument in a motion, just the principal ones that are well-developed. *See United States v. Vaughn*, 62 F.4th 1071, 1072–73 (7th Cir. 2023). In any case, any oversight was harmless because the judge provided an independent basis to affirm: He concluded that, under the § 3553(a) sentencing factors, releasing Luedtke would conflict with the goals of punishment, deterrence, and protecting the public from an armed robber with a long criminal history who had served only about half of his 37-year prison term. This is an adequate ground for denying the motion. *See* 18 U.S.C. §§ 3553(a)(1), (2); *United States v. Williams*, 65 F.4th 343, 349 (7th Cir. 2023). One good reason suffices to deny a compassionate-release motion, *see United States v. Ugbah*, 4 F.4th 595, 598 (7th Cir. 2021), and the judge’s reasoning about the § 3553(a) factors is uncontested here.

AFFIRMED