

NONPRECEDENTIAL DISPOSITION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 March 22, 2023*

Decided May 11, 2023

Before

MICHAEL Y. SCUDDER, *Circuit Judge*

THOMAS L. KIRSCH II, *Circuit Judge*

DORIS L. PRYOR, *Circuit Judge*

No. 22-2363

USHA SOUJANYA KARRI,
Plaintiff-Appellant,

v.

MERRICK B. GARLAND, et al.,
Defendants-Appellees.

Appeal from the United States District
Court for the Northern District of
Illinois, Eastern Division.

No. 22 C 55

Ronald A. Guzmán,
Judge.

ORDER

Usha Karri suspected that her husband was orchestrating a wide-ranging conspiracy to kill her, take her property, and gain custody over their two children. She brought a sprawling civil-rights complaint against him and numerous others for their roles in the alleged scheme to deprive her of due process. *See* 42 U.S.C. § 1983. After

* 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).

providing Karri two opportunities to amend, the district court dismissed her complaint with prejudice because she failed to comply with pleading requirements and because the relief she sought was foreclosed on abstention grounds. We affirm.

We recount the facts based on Karri's complaint and appellate briefs. *Stanard v. Nygren*, 658 F.3d 792, 794 (7th Cir. 2011). She alleged that her husband abused and manipulated her for many years. As the abuse escalated, she initiated divorce proceedings and sought custody of their children. After the divorce proceedings began, her husband plotted to kill her and an uncle of hers. Her husband unwittingly contacted an undercover federal agent posing as a hitman and was arrested. He was convicted, after trial, of soliciting a crime of violence. *See United States v. Bhogireddy*, No. 1:19-cr-00769 (N.D. Ill. May 27, 2021). He remains in federal custody, and his sentencing hearing is scheduled to take place shortly.

Karri sees her husband's attempt to hire a hitman as part of a broader plot to deny her a fair divorce proceeding and cover up his wrongdoing. She says that he bribed and conspired with state judges and private divorce attorneys to secure favorable custody decisions and conceal his abuse. She also says that her husband persuaded federal prosecutors and the Chicago police to cover up evidence of the attempted hit and past incidents of sexual assault and abuse. For all of this, Karri sought damages, an injunction ordering the U.S. Department of Justice and the Chicago police to investigate the cover-up, and an injunction to stay her divorce proceedings until that investigation ended.

The district court struck Karri's complaint, which ran 363 pages, for not complying with federal pleading requirements. The court explained that Rule 8(a)(2) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure requires a short and plain statement of the claim, and her complaint clearly violated that rule. The court invited her to amend her complaint but warned that it would strike any amended complaint if it were not "significantly shorter."

Karri submitted an amended complaint that was 194 pages, and the court struck this complaint too. The amended complaint was "unwieldy," and the court stated that it could not discern what claims she was alleging and against whom. To help her amend her complaint again, the court advised her that certain defendants named in the complaint may be entitled to absolute immunity from suit and that she may not bring unrelated claims against different defendants in the same case.

Karri then filed a 192-page, second amended complaint that repeated her due process claims against the same defendants. The court described this filing as bulky and unmanageable, and dismissed it under Rule 8(a). To the extent she sought injunctive relief that would interfere with the ongoing state-court divorce proceeding, the court found it appropriate to abstain from ruling on her due process claims. *See J.B. v. Woodard*, 997 F.3d 714, 723 (7th Cir. 2021). The court ruled in the alternative that there were other grounds for dismissal of the suit: absolute immunity barred her claims against the state-court judges, the guardian ad litem, and the court-appointed psychiatrist; she failed to state a plausible claim against the police officers, the private attorneys, and her husband; and her conspiracy allegations were too conclusory to state a claim.

Karri filed a motion for reconsideration that the court denied based on her failure to identify any manifest error of law or fact.

On appeal, Karri generally challenges the district court's dismissal of her complaint, but we begin with her challenge to the court's ruling on abstention, which, as a non-merits threshold matter, we address first. *See Meyers v. Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wis.*, 836 F.3d 818, 823 (7th Cir. 2016). She argues that because she seeks an injunction only to pause the state divorce proceedings to allow for an investigation of her husband, the degree of federal intervention she seeks in the state-court case is minimal.

To the extent Karri seeks injunctive relief, the district court appropriately abstained from ruling on her due process claim. In our recent decision in *J.B.*, we held that the principles underlying the abstention doctrines—the principles of comity, equity, and federalism—require federal courts to abstain from cases that might interfere with state domestic-court proceedings, even when none of the abstention doctrines is a perfect fit. 997 F.3d at 722. Karri argues that she seeks not to intervene in the state domestic-court case, but to spur an investigation into fraud and corruption by state officials. But the injunctive relief she seeks would intrude into an ongoing state domestic-court proceeding—an area of law traditionally reserved for the states—and in such circumstances federal courts must stay on the sidelines. *Id.* at 722–23.

As for the court's ruling that her complaint violated Rule 8(a)(2), she asserts that she could not present a short and plain statement of her case because she needed to describe the conspiracy and fraud of 11 separate defendants with particularity. But Rule 8(a)(2)'s requirements to present a short and plain statement of the case do not conflict with Rule 9(b)'s heightened pleading requirements for fraud and conspiracy: "it

is possible to write a short statement narrating the *claim*—which is to say, the basic grievance—even if Rule 9(b) requires supplemental particulars.” *U.S. ex rel. Garst v. Lockheed-Martin Corp.*, 328 F.3d 374, 376 (7th Cir. 2003). The court acted well within its discretion to dismiss the remainder of Karri’s complaint for failing to conform with Rule 8(a)(2).

AFFIRMED