92 S.Ct. 594
Supreme Court of the United States

Francis HAINES, Petitioner,

v.

Otto J. KERNER, former Governor, State of Illinois, et al.

No. 70—5025.

Argued Dec. 6, 1971.

Decided Jan. 13, 1972.

Rehearing Denied Feb. 22, 1972.

See 405 U.S. 948, 92 S.Ct. 963.

Synopsis

State prison inmate brought an action against the governor of Illinois and other state officers and prison officials to recover damages. The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Illinois dismissed the complaint and the prisoner appealed. The United States Court of Appeals for the seventh Circuit, 427 F.2d 71, affirmed and certiorari was granted. The Supreme Court held that allegations of pro se complaint of state prisoner, seeking to recover damages for claimed injuries and deprivation of rights while placed in solitary confinement as a disciplinary measure after he had struck another inmate on the head with a shovel following a verbal altercation and asserting as physical suffering the aggravation of a preexisting foot injury and circulatory ailment caused by being required to sleep on floor of cell with only blankets, were such as to entitle him to an opportunity to offer proof, since it did not appear beyond doubt that prisoner could prove no set of facts in support of his claim which would entitle him to relief.

Reversed and remanded.

Mr. Justice Powell and Mr. Justice Rehnquist took no part in consideration or decision of case.

Procedural Posture(s): On Appeal.

Attorneys and Law Firms

***519 **595** Stanley A. Bass, New York City, for petitioner.

Warren K. Smoot, Chicago, Ill., for respondents, pro hac vice, by special leave of Court.

Opinion

PER CURIAM.

Petitioner, an inmate at the Illinois State Penitentiary, Menard, Illinois, commenced this action against the Governor of Illinois and other state officers and prison officials under the Civil Rights Act of 1871, 17 Stat. 13, 42 U.S.C. s 1983, and 28 U.S.C. s 1343(3), seeking to recover damages for claimed injuries and deprivation of rights while incarcerated under a judgment not challenged here. ***520** Petitioner's pro se complaint was premised on alleged action of prison officials placing him in solitary confinement as a disciplinary measure after he had struck another inmate on the head with a shovel following a verbal altercation. The assault by petitioner on another inmate is not denied. Petitioner's pro se complaint included general allegations of physical injuries suffered while in disciplinary confinement and denial of due process in the steps leading to that confinement. The claimed physical suffering was aggravation of a preexisting foot injury and a circulatory ailment caused by forcing him to sleep on the floor of his cell with only blankets.

The District Court granted respondents' motion under Rule 12(b)(6) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure to dismiss the complaint for failure to state a claim upon which relief could be granted, suggesting that only under exceptional circumstances should courts inquire into the internal operations of state penitentiaries and concluding that petitioner had failed to show a deprivation of federally protected rights. The Court of Appeals affirmed, 427 F.2d 71, emphasizing that prison officials are vested with 'wide discretion' in disciplinary matters. We granted certiorari and appointed counsel to represent petitioner. The only issue now before us is petitioner's contention that the District Court erred in dismissing his pro se complaint without allowing him to present evidence on his claims.

Whatever may be the limits on the scope of inquiry of courts into the internal administration of prisons, allegations such as those asserted by petitioner, ****596** however inartfully pleaded, are sufficient to call for the opportunity to offer supporting evidence. We cannot say with assurance that under the allegations of the pro se complaint, which we hold to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers, it appears ***521** 'beyond doubt that the plaintiff can prove no set of facts in support of his claim which would entitle him to relief.' Conley v. Gibson, 355 U.S. 41, 45—46, 78 S.Ct. 99, 102, 2 L.Ed.2d 80 (1957). See Dioguardi v. Durning, 139 F.2d 774 (CA2 1944).

Accordingly, although we intimate no view whatever on the merits of petitioner's allegations, we conclude that he is entitled to an opportunity to offer proof. The judgment is reversed and the case is remanded for further proceedings consistent herewith.

Reversed and remanded.

Mr. Justice POWELL and Mr. Justice REHNQUIST took no part in the consideration or decision of this case.