UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

CIVIL MINUTES – GENERAL

Case No.	2:26-cv-05196-SPG-E	Date	May 15, 2026
Title	Santa Paula Animal Rescue Center Inc et al v. Ventura County et al		

Present: The Honorable	SHERILYN PEACE GARNETT UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

P. Gomez	Not Reported
Deputy Clerk	Court Reporter / Recorder
Attorneys Present for Plaintiff:	Attorneys Present for Defendants:
Not Present	Not Present

Proceeding: **(IN CHAMBERS) ORDER RE SUPPLEMENTAL BRIEFING FOR PLAINTIFFS' EX PARTE APPLICATION FOR TEMPORARY RESTRAINING ORDER [ECF NO. 2]**

I. Background

On May 14, 2026, Plaintiffs Santa Paula Animal Rescue Center, Inc. and Claire Birgy ("Plaintiffs") filed a Verified Complaint, (ECF No. 1 ("Complaint")) and Emergency Ex Parte Application for Temporary Restraining Order and Order to Show Cause Re Preliminary Injunction, (ECF No. 2 ("Application")). Plaintiffs request the Court enjoin Defendants Ventura County, Ventura County Animal Services, and City of Oxnard ("Defendants") from "euthanizing, killing, or otherwise harming" their canine companion, Bruce. (App. at 1). Plaintiffs represent that, on March 24, 2026, Ventura County Animal Services found Bruce to be a "viscous" dog and ordered Bruce "destroyed." (Compl. at 11). Bruce is scheduled to be euthanized by Defendants on May 15, 2026, at 11:30 a.m. (App.). On May 14, 2026, Plaintiffs also filed a Notice of Non-Opposition from the City of Oxnard. (ECF No. 9 ("Notice")). In the Notice, Plaintiffs' counsel represents that she spoke with counsel for the City of Oxnard, who stated that "she did not have any opposition to Plaintiff's request for a stay of execution" and that the City of Oxnard would not be submitting "any opposition." (*Id.*).

Plaintiffs argue that injunctive relief is warranted under the Fourth, Fifth, and Fourteenth Amendments. *See* (Compl.). Plaintiffs allege that the City of Oxnard and Ventura unlawfully seized Bruce, their personal property, and thus violated the Fourth Amendment. (*Id.* at 12–13). Plaintiffs also allege that the proceedings leading up to Bruce's euthanasia determination were deficient. *See* (*id.*). According to the Complaint, Defendants conducted three administrative hearings to determine whether Bruce was a vicious animal, with the first on March 5, 2026, the third on March 24, 2026, and the second on an unknown date in between. (*Id.* at 10). Plaintiffs argue that the administrative hearings were procedurally deficient because they did not receive notice of the second hearing and were denied an opportunity to object to the evidence presented at the first and third hearings. (*Id.*). Upon receiving an adverse administrative ruling,

Plaintiffs filed an appeal before Ventura County Superior Court, and the appeal is also alleged to be procedurally deficient because it "does not, on its face, identify separate appeals from the [first and third] administrative proceedings." (*Id.* at 11). The hearing before Ventura County Superior Court was set for April 15, 2026. (*Id.*).

Today, May 15, 2026, Defendants Ventura County and Ventura County Animal Services filed an Opposition to the Application. (ECF No. 12 ("Opp.")). Defendants dispute Plaintiff's characterization of the administrative and Superior Court proceedings and argue that (1) Bruce's seizure was permissive pursuant to Ventura County Ordinance code section 4470 through 4470-18; and (2) Plaintiff Santa Paula Rescue Center, Inc. waived its due process claims by failing to raise the argument before Ventura County Superior Court. (*Id.* at 6).

II. Legal Standard

Fed. R. Civ. P. 65(b) governs temporary restraining orders ("TRO"). A TRO is "an extraordinary remedy that may only be awarded upon a clear showing that the plaintiff is entitled to such relief." *Winter v. Nat. Res. Def. Council*, 555 U.S. 7, 22 (2008). The purpose of a TRO is to preserve the status quo before a preliminary injunction hearing may be held. *Granny Goose Foods, Inc. v. Bhd. of Teamsters & Auto Truck Drivers Loc. No. 70 of Alameda Cnty.*, 415 U.S. 423, 439 (1974). Similarly, the purpose of a preliminary injunction is to preserve the status quo and the rights of the parties until a final judgment on the merits can be rendered. *See U.S. Philips Corp. v. KBC Bank N.V.*, 590 F.3d 1091, 1094 (9th Cir. 2010).

The propriety of a temporary restraining order, in particular, hinges on a significant threat of irreparable injury, *Simula, Inc. Autoliv, Inc.*, 175 F.3d 716, 725 (9th Cir. 1999), that must be imminent in nature, *Caribbean Marine Servs. Co. v. Baldridge*, 844 F.2d 668, 674 (9th Cir. 1988). Thus, a court may issue a TRO only if the plaintiff establishes "(1) that he is likely to succeed on the merits, (2) that he is likely to suffer irreparable harm in the absence of preliminary relief, (3) that the balance of equities tips in his favor, and (4) that an injunction is in the public interest." *All. for the Wild Rockies v. Cottrell*, 632 F.3d 1127, 1131 (9th Cir. 2011) (quoting *Winter*, 555 U.S. at 20).

When a TRO is filed as an ex parte application, the moving party must "establish why the accompanying proposed motion for the ultimate relief requested cannot be calendared in the usual manner." *Mission Power Eng.'g Co. v. Cont'l Cas. Co.*, 883 F. Supp. 488, 492 (C.D. Cal. 1995). The party seeking ex parte relief must "show that the moving party's cause will be irreparably prejudiced if the underlying motion is heard according to regular noticed motion procedures," and that the moving party is "without fault in creating the crisis that requires ex parte relief, or that the crisis occurred as a result of excusable neglect." *Id.*

III. Discussion

As a threshold matter, the Court is unable to determine whether it has subject matter jurisdiction to hear the case.

Federal courts are courts of limited jurisdiction, having subject matter jurisdiction only over matters authorized by the Constitution and Congress. *Kokkonen v. Guardian Life Ins. Co. of Am.*, 511 U.S. 375, 377 (1994). Principles of federalism dictate that "the United States Supreme Court is the only federal court empowered to review the final judgments of state courts." *Miroth v. Cnty. of Trinity*, 136 F.4th 1141, 1146 (9th Cir. 2025) (citing 28 U.S.C. § 1257(a)). An appeal of a state court judgment filed in federal district court is "a forbidden de facto appeal over which a district court lacks subject matter jurisdiction." *Id.* (internal quotation marks and citation omitted). This principle is known as the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine, and limits federal courts' ability to grant relief from judgments entered in state courts. *See Lance v. Dennis*, 546 U.S. 459, 463 (2006). In the Ninth Circuit, *Rooker-Feldman* does not pose a jurisdictional bar to cases arising from a final state court judgment where "the federal plaintiff both asserts as her injury legal error or errors by the state court *and* seeks as her remedy relief from state court." *Miroth*, 136 F.4th at 1151 (internal quotation marks and citation omitted). Where a federal court is unable to determine whether it has jurisdiction over a case arising in state court, it may issue a temporary stay of the proceedings to determine its jurisdictional authority. *See Aspic Eng'g & Constr. Co. v. ECC CENTCOM Constructors, LLC*, No. 17-cv-00224-YGR, 2017 WL 2289219, at *2 (N.D. Cal. May 25, 2017) ("*Rooker–Feldman* does not bar a federal district court from 'proper exercise of its jurisdiction to manage its cases' even if this 'has the secondary effect of voiding a state court determination.'") (citing *In re Diet Drugs*, 282 F.3d 220, 242 (3d Cir. 2002)).

The Anti-Injunction Act also limits federal courts' jurisdiction to issue "injunctions against the execution or enforcement of state judgments." *Henrichs v. Valley View Development*, 474 F.3d 609, 616 (9th Cir. 2007). Specifically, the Anti-Injunction Act provides that "[a] court of the United States may not grant an injunction to stay proceedings in a State court except as expressly authorized by Act of Congress, or where necessary in aid of its jurisdiction, or to protect or effectuate its judgments." *See* 28 U.S.C. § 2283. However, a valid civil rights claim pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 qualifies as an exception to the Anti-Injunction Act "expressly authorized by Act of Congress." *See Mitchum v. Foster*, 407 U.S. 225, 243 (1972).

Based on the Court's review of the Complaint, Application, and Opposition, the Court is unable to conclude whether it has jurisdiction over the case. *See Ruhrgas AG v. Marathon Oil Co.*, 526 U.S. 574, 583 (1999) (a federal court has a continuing obligation to assure it possesses subject matter jurisdiction). Plaintiffs raise § 1983 claims in their Complaint and contend that the proceedings in state court were so procedurally deficient as to deny them due process under the Fourteenth Amendment. *See* (Compl.). In light of the Court's continuing

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obligation to assure its jurisdiction and the euthanization of Bruce set to take place today, May 15, 2026, in approximately 20 minutes, the Court ORDERS as follows:

1. Defendants are ENJOINED from executing the judgment entered on March 24, 2026, by the Ventura County Animal Services ordering destruction of the dog known as Bruce pending adjudication of the Application; and
2. The parties are ORDERED to show cause by Wednesday, May 20, 2026, by filing a joint brief no more than ten (10) pages, whether the Court has subject matter jurisdiction over the case.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

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