

NONPRECEDENTIAL DISPOSITION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 November 4, 2025*

Decided November 6, 2025

Before

MICHAEL Y. SCUDDER, *Circuit Judge*

THOMAS L. KIRSCH II, *Circuit Judge*

CANDACE JACKSON-AKIWUMI, *Circuit Judge*

No. 24-2565

ANDREW D. COE,
Plaintiff-Appellant,

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

v.

No. 15 C 6869

DARRIN ATKINS, et al.,
Defendants-Appellees.

Thomas M. Durkin,
Judge.

ORDER

Andrew Coe sued four correctional officers and a doctor under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, alleging they were deliberately indifferent to his need for high-top shoes to manage his

* 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).

painful foot condition. The district court entered summary judgment for the defendants. We affirm the judgment.

We recount the facts in the light most favorable to Coe and draw all reasonable inferences in his favor. *See Riley v. Waterman*, 126 F.4th 1287, 1295 (7th Cir. 2025). Coe suffers from foot drop, a neurological condition that prevents him from using the muscles that control his feet, leading to numbness and painful spasms. To walk, Coe uses a cane and wears leg braces. When Coe arrived at the Northern Reception and Classification Center in Joliet, Illinois, on September 26, 2014, he was wearing these leg braces and a pair of high-top sneakers. Because of his foot drop, the healthcare unit gave him a 30-day permit to keep his sneakers, instead of returning them to his family and giving him the Center's standard shoes, which are low-top and have no laces.

On October 9, the Center's medical director submitted a referral to Dr. Stephen Ritz seeking well-cushioned and arched walking shoes for Coe. The director did not mention that Coe wore leg braces or needed specific shoes to stabilize the braces. Dr. Ritz denied the referral because the request did "not meet Wexford policy" and Coe had no "medical necessity for walking shoes." Rather, Coe had "access to walking shoes in the commissary, as well as heel cups and shoe inserts." The director did not appeal Dr. Ritz's decision, and Coe's permit expired on October 26.

Coe continued to wear his high-top sneakers for three weeks, until November 19. That day Officers Brandi Best (née Walker) and Darrin Atkins asked him if he had permission to wear them and Coe presented the expired medical permit. Best and Atkins then confirmed with the health unit that the permit had expired and that no new permit had been issued. Based on this information, the officers returned to confiscate Coe's shoes, giving Coe the standard shoes instead.

Later that day, Coe's right foot slid out of his new shoe. His toe slammed into the cement wall of his cell, causing redness, swelling, and a one-inch laceration that Coe testified left his bone exposed. Coe received prompt treatment. A few weeks later, Coe suffered a similar injury to a different toe when his other foot slipped out of his shoe in the same manner. Coe testified that Officers Damian Bragg and Lorient Stanback were nearby but did not respond as he cried out in pain. Ninety minutes later, another officer took Coe to receive medical treatment.

Coe then sued Officers Atkins, Best, Stanback, Bragg, and Dr. Ritz for deliberate indifference to his medical needs under the Eighth Amendment. After recruiting a

lawyer for Coe and proceeding through discovery, the district court entered summary judgment for the defendants. The district court reasoned that Atkins and Best were entitled to rely on the medical staff's determination that Coe did not have an active medical permit for high-top shoes. And Dr. Ritz was not deliberately indifferent for denying him such a permit, because there was no evidence that Dr. Ritz knew that Coe wore leg braces or needed high-top shoes when he exercised his medical judgment to deny the referral. Finally, the district court ruled that no reasonable jury could conclude that Bragg and Stanback exacerbated Coe's injury or prolonged his pain.

On appeal, Coe maintains that a jury could find that Atkins, Best, and Dr. Ritz were deliberately indifferent to his need for high-top shoes and that Bragg and Stanback ignored his pleas for help. To prevail on these claims, Coe needed to show (1) that he had an objectively serious medical condition and (2) prison officials were "deliberately, that is subjectively, indifferent" to his condition. *Johnson v. Dominguez*, 5 F.4th 818, 824 (7th Cir. 2021) (quoting *Whiting v. Wexford Health Sources, Inc.*, 839 F.3d 658, 662 (7th Cir. 2016)). The defendants do not contest that foot drop is a serious medical condition.

Coe first argues that the district court overlooked factual disputes about Atkins's and Best's knowledge of his need for high-top shoes. He reasons that, because they oversaw his daily needs, a jury could infer that they knew he needed high-top shoes to hold his leg braces in place. Even if the officers were aware that Coe used these shoes and why, the prison medical staff correctly informed the officers that Coe's medical permit for those shoes had expired. Prison officials are entitled to defer to the medical staff's judgment on whether an accommodation is medically necessary. *See Giles v. Godinez*, 914 F.3d 1040, 1049–50 (7th Cir. 2019). Investigating a prisoner's medical care with the appropriate providers is precisely what officers are supposed to do in a situation like this, and they have no duty to act further absent knowledge that medical providers are mistreating the prisoner. *See Hayes v. Snyder*, 546 F.3d 516, 527 (7th Cir. 2008). Coe provides no evidence that he was being mistreated, let alone that the officers knew of any mistreatment.

Indeed, although Coe next argues that Dr. Ritz's denial of the referral amounted to deliberate indifference, he has not identified a genuine dispute on that question. He rests on the fact that the on-site medical director believed that Coe needed well-cushioned and arched walking shoes. But to show deliberate indifference, Coe needed to provide evidence that Dr. Ritz's finding that these shoes were not medically necessary represented "so significant a departure from accepted professional standards or practices" that a jury could find Dr. Ritz was not exercising his professional

judgment. *Riley*, 126 F.4th at 1295 (quoting *Pyles v. Fahim*, 771 F.3d 403, 409 (7th Cir. 2014)). The undisputed evidence shows Dr. Ritz relied on the information given to him, even if incomplete, and made a reasoned medical judgment in denying Coe the requested shoes based on the information he had. A mere difference in opinion among medical providers is not evidence of deliberate indifference. See *Murphy v. Wexford Health Sources Inc.*, 962 F.3d 911, 916 (7th Cir. 2020).

Lastly, Coe maintains that Stanback and Bragg ignored his injury for over 90 minutes while he called for help. Although Coe may have identified a genuine dispute about whether they heard him, the district court recognized that such a dispute alone is not enough to survive summary judgment. Coe also needed to provide some evidence from which a reasonable jury could find that the delay exacerbated his condition or caused unnecessary pain. See *Wilson v. Adams*, 901 F.3d 816, 822 (7th Cir. 2018). Coe contends that a 2022 surgery on the same toe shows that his injury worsened from the delay, but that evidence—produced four years after the close of discovery—was inadmissible. FED. R. CIV. P. 37(c)(1). Regardless, he has not identified any “verifying medical evidence” connecting the surgery to his injury eight years earlier, let alone the 90-minute delay in treatment. *Knight v. Wiseman*, 590 F.3d 458, 466 (7th Cir. 2009). There is also no reason to believe prompt medical treatment would have alleviated his pain sooner. When he eventually received treatment, his injury was dressed and cleaned, but his medical records show that he was not provided a pain reliever—regular strength acetaminophen—until the next day. See *id.*

We have considered Coe’s remaining arguments, but none merits discussion.

AFFIRMED