

NOT PRECEDENTIAL

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE THIRD CIRCUIT

No. 25-2150

LILLIE COLEY,
Appellant

v.

SUPREME COURT OF NEW JERSEY; JUDGE DEBORAH SILVERMAN-KATZ;
JUDGE CHARLES W. DORTCH, JR.; JUDGE STEVEN J. POLANSKY; JUDGE
EDWARD J. MCBRIDE, JR., J.S.C.; JUDGE SHERRI SCHWEITZER; JUDGE
SAMUEL BERNADINE; NEW JERSEY SUPERIOR COURT FAMILY DIVISION &
CIVIL LAW DIVISION; NEW JERSEY APPELLATE COURT; NEW JERSEY
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS, AOC

On Appeal from the United States District Court
for the District of New Jersey
(D.C. Civil Action No. 1:24-cv-10724)
District Judge: Honorable Edward S. Kiel

Submitted Pursuant to Third Circuit LAR 34.1(a)
March 17, 2026
Before: HARDIMAN, FREEMAN, and ROTH, *Circuit Judges*

(Opinion filed: October 15, 2026)

OPINION*

PER CURIAM

* This disposition is not an opinion of the full Court and pursuant to I.O.P. 5.7 does not constitute binding precedent.

Lillie Coley, proceeding pro se, appeals from the District Court's order dismissing her complaint with prejudice. We will affirm.

I.

Coley filed a complaint in the District Court pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against the New Jersey state court system and several New Jersey state court judges, alleging that her constitutional rights had been violated in the course of state-court litigation related to family law matters. After plaintiff filed an amended complaint, all defendants filed a motion to dismiss for lack of jurisdiction. Coley opposed the motion, and a hearing was held on the matter on May 21, 2025. The District Court entered an order the next day, granting the defendants' motion to dismiss because plaintiff's claims were barred by the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine, sovereign immunity, and judicial immunity. Plaintiff filed a timely notice of appeal. Plaintiff filed a pro se brief in our Court, defendants filed a response, and plaintiff filed a reply brief.

II.

We have jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1291 and “our review of the district court's application of the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine is plenary.” *Turner v. Crawford Square Apartments III, L.P.*, 449 F.3d 542, 547 (3d Cir. 2006). We also exercise plenary review over the District Court's grant of judicial immunity, *see Gallas v. Supreme Ct. of Pennsylvania*, 211 F.3d 760, 768 (3d Cir. 2000), and Eleventh Amendment immunity. *Haybarger v. Lawrence Cnty. Adult Prob. & Parole*, 551 F.3d 193, 197 (3d Cir. 2008).

III.

The District Court did not err in granting defendants' motion to dismiss. To the extent that Plaintiff seeks to directly overturn several years of state court judgments against her, the District Court properly concluded that it did not have jurisdiction over those claims, pursuant to the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine. *See Great W. Mining & Min. Co. v. Fox Rothschild LLP*, 615 F.3d 159, 166 (3d Cir. 2010) (explaining that the doctrine applies when “(1) the federal plaintiff lost in state court; (2) the plaintiff complains of injuries caused by the state-court judgments; (3) those judgments were rendered before the federal suit was filed; and (4) the plaintiff is inviting the district court to review and reject the state judgments.” (citation modified)).

The District Court properly concluded that the plaintiff's claims against the New Jersey Supreme Court, Superior Court, Appellate Court, and Administrative Office of the Courts were barred by Eleventh Amendment immunity. The Eleventh Amendment prohibits private parties from bringing suit against a state in federal court, unless the state has explicitly waived its immunity or Congress has validly abrogated it. *See Benn v. First Jud. Dist. of Pa.*, 426 F.3d 233, 238-39 (3d Cir. 2005). Even when the state is not the named party in the dispute, a party may still enjoy Eleventh Amendment immunity if the state is the real party in interest. *See id.* at 239. The New Jersey court systems that Coley seeks to sue are “arms of the state,” which entitles them to Eleventh Amendment immunity. *See Chisolm v. McManimon*, 275 F.3d 315, 323–24 (3d Cir. 2001). New Jersey has not waived its Eleventh Amendment immunity, *see Allen v. N.J. State Police*, 974 F.3d 497, 505 (3d Cir. 2020), nor has Congress abrogated the state's immunity. *See*

Quern v. Jordan, 440 U.S. 332, 345 (1979). Therefore, the District Court properly dismissed plaintiff's claims against those entities.

The District Court properly determined that Coley's claims against individual judges were barred by the principles of judicial immunity. Judicial immunity is applicable so long as the challenged action was done in the judge's judicial capacity and was not taken in the complete absence of jurisdiction. *See Gallas*, 211 F.3d at 768. Appellant claims that immunity should not apply because the judges acted with an improper purpose, but the law is to the contrary. *See Dennis v. Sparks*, 449 U.S. 24, 26-27 (1980) (holding that a judge who was alleged to have taken a bribe in exchange for issuing an injunction was properly dismissed from the lawsuit on the basis of judicial immunity); *Gallas*, 211 F.3d at 771-72 (holding that judicial immunity is not forfeited by allegations of corrupt motive, malice, unfairness or the commission of grave procedural errors).

Appellant further argues that her claims are not barred by judicial immunity because they arise from administrative actions taken by the New Jersey judges, rather than from judicial actions. *See Forrester v. White*, 484 U.S. 219, 228 (1988) ("Administrative decisions, even though they may be essential to the very functioning of the courts, have not similarly been regarded as judicial acts."). Administrative acts in this context generally refer to acts taken in furtherance of court operation, like personnel and employment decisions. *See, e.g., id.* at 229. Here, the actions Coley complains of, like responding to discovery requests and entering orders that parties used to establish liens,

are judicial and adjudicative in nature and are therefore actions from which a judge is entitled to absolute immunity. *Forrester*, 484 U.S. at 229.

Finally, Coley argues that because the judges lacked jurisdiction in her state court litigation, their actions were not entitled to judicial immunity. This argument also fails because, according to her complaint, the New Jersey state court judges determined that they lacked personal jurisdiction over the defendant she sought to sue in state court, not subject-matter jurisdiction. Regardless of personal jurisdiction, a judge will be immune from suit for a judicial act if, “at the time he took the challenged action he had jurisdiction over the subject matter before him.” *Stump v. Sparkman*, 435 U.S. 349, 356 (1978); *see also Holloway v. Brush*, 220 F.3d 767, 773 (6th Cir. 2000) (en banc) (stressing that lack of personal jurisdiction does not abrogate judicial immunity). The judges Coley seeks to sue did not act in the complete absence of jurisdiction, and are therefore entitled to immunity for their judicial acts.

Accordingly, we will affirm the judgment of the District Court.