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NOTE: Where it is feasible, a syllabus (headnote) will be released, as is being done in connection with this case, at the time the opinion is issued. The syllabus constitutes no part of the opinion of the Court but has been prepared by the Reporter of Decisions for the convenience of the reader. See *United States* v. *Detroit Timber & Lumber Co.*, 200 U. S. 321, 337.

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

Syllabus

PORTER ET AL. *v.* NUSSLE

CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE SECOND CIRCUIT

No. 00–853. Argued January 14, 2002—Decided February 26, 2002

Without filing a grievance under applicable Connecticut Department of Correction procedures, plaintiff-respondent Nussle, a state prison inmate, commenced a federal court action under 42 U. S. C. §1983, charging that corrections officers, including defendant-petitioner Porter, had subjected him to a sustained pattern of harassment and intimidation and had singled him out for a severe beating in violation of the Eighth Amendment's ban on "cruel and unusual punishments." The District Court dismissed Nussle's suit, relying on a provision of the Prison Litigation Reform Act of 1995 (PLRA), 42 U. S. C. §1997e(a), that directs: "No action shall be brought with respect to prison conditions under section 1983 . . . , or any other Federal law, by a prisoner . . . until such administrative remedies as are available are exhausted." The Second Circuit reversed, holding that exhaustion of administrative remedies is not required for a claim of the kind Nussle asserted. The appeals court concluded that §1997e(a)'s "prison conditions" phrase covers only conditions affecting prisoners generally, not single incidents that immediately affect only particular prisoners, such as corrections officers' use of excessive force. In support of its position, the court cited legislative history suggesting that the PLRA curtails frivolous suits, not actions seeking relief from corrections officer brutality; the court also referred to pre-PLRA decisions in which this Court distinguished, for proof of injury and *mens rea* purposes, between excessive force claims and conditions of confinement claims.

Held: The PLRA's exhaustion requirement applies to all inmate suits about prison life, whether they involve general circumstances or particular episodes, and whether they allege excessive force or some other wrong. Cf. *Wilson* v. *Seiter,* 501 U. S. 294, 299, n. 1. Pp. 5–14.

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(a) The current exhaustion provision in §1997e(a) differs markedly from its predecessor. Once within the district court's discretion, exhaustion in §1997e(a) cases is now mandatory. See *Booth* v. *Churner*, 532 U. S. 731, 739. And unlike the previous provision, which encompassed only §1983 suits, exhaustion is now required for all "action[s] . . . brought with respect to prison conditions." Section 1997e(a), designed to reduce the quantity and improve the quality of prisoner suits, affords corrections officials an opportunity to address complaints internally before allowing the initiation of a federal case. In some instances, corrective action taken in response to an inmate's grievance might improve prison administration and satisfy the inmate, thereby obviating the need for litigation. *Id.,* at 737. In other instances, the internal review might filter out some frivolous claims. *Ibid.* And for cases ultimately brought to court, an administrative record clarifying the controversy's contours could facilitate adjudication. See, *e.g., ibid.* Pp. 5–7.

(b) Determination of the meaning of §1997e(a)'s "prison conditions" phrase is guided by the PLRA's text and context, and by this Court's prior decisions relating to "[s]uits by prisoners," as §1997e is titled. The pathmarking opinion is *McCarthy* v. *Bronson,* 500 U. S. 136, in which the Court construed the Federal Magistrates Act's authorization to district judges to refer "prisoner petitions challenging conditions of confinement" to magistrate judges. This Court concluded in *McCarthy* that, read in its proper context, the phrase "challenging conditions of confinement" authorizes the nonconsensual reference of *all* prisoner petitions to a magistrate, *id.,* at 139. The *McCarthy* Court emphasized that *Preiser* v. *Rodriguez,* 411 U. S. 475, had unambiguously placed cases involving single episodes of unconstitutional conduct within the broad category of prisoner petitions challenging conditions of confinement, 500 U. S., at 141; found it telling that Congress, in composing the Magistrates Act, chose language that so clearly paralleled the *Preiser* opinion, 500 U. S., at 142; and considered it significant that the latter Act's purpose—to lighten overworked district judges' caseload—would be thwarted by allowing satellite litigation over the precise contours of an exception for single episode cases, *id.,* at 143. The general presumption that Congress expects its statutes to be read in conformity with this Court's precedents, *United States* v. *Wells,* 519 U. S. 482, 495, and the PLRA's dominant concern to promote administrative redress, filter out groundless claims, and foster better prepared litigation of claims aired in court, see *Booth* v. *Churner,* 532 U. S., at 737, persuade the Court that §1997e(a)'s key words "prison conditions" are properly read through the lens of *McCarthy* and *Preiser*. Those decisions tug strongly away from classifying suits about prison guards' use of ex-

cessive force, one or many times, as anything other than actions "with respect to prison conditions." Nussle misplaces principal reliance on *Hudson* v. *McMillian,* 503 U. S. 1, 8–9, and *Farmer* v. *Brennan,* 511 U. S. 825, 835–836. Although those cases did distinguish excessive force claims from conditions of confinement claims, they did so in the context of proof requirements: what injury must a plaintiff allege and show; what mental state must a plaintiff plead and prove. Proof requirements, once a case is in court, however, do not touch or concern the threshold inquiry at issue here: whether resort to a prison grievance process must precede resort to a court. There is no reason to believe that Congress meant to release the evidentiary distinctions drawn in *Hudson* and *Farmer* from their moorings and extend their application to §1997e(a)'s otherwise invigorated exhaustion requirement. It is at least equally plausible that Congress inserted "prison conditions" into the exhaustion provision simply to make it clear that preincarceration claims fall outside §1997e(a), for example, a §1983 claim against the prisoner's arresting officer. Furthermore, the asserted distinction between excessive force claims and exhaustion-mandatory "frivolous" claims is untenable, for excessive force claims can be frivolous, and exhaustion serves purposes beyond weeding out frivolous allegations. Pp. 7–12.

(c) Other infirmities inhere in the Second Circuit's disposition. See *McCarthy*, 500 U. S., at 143. In the prison environment, a specific incident may be symptomatic of a systemic problem, rather than aberrational. *Id.,* at 143–144. Nussle urges that his case could be placed in the isolated episode category, but he might equally urge that his complaint describes a pattern or practice of harassment climaxing in the alleged beating. It seems unlikely that Congress, when it included in the PLRA a firm exhaustion requirement, meant to leave the need to exhaust to the pleader's option. Cf. *Preiser*, 411 U. S., at 489–490. Moreover, the appeals court's disposition augurs complexity; bifurcated proceedings would be normal thereunder when, for example, a prisoner sues both the corrections officer alleged to have used excessive force and the supervisor who allegedly failed adequately to monitor those in his charge. Finally, scant sense supports the single occurrence, prevailing circumstance dichotomy. For example, prison authorities' interest in receiving prompt notice of, and opportunity to take action against, guard brutality is no less compelling than their interest in receiving notice and an opportunity to stop other types of staff wrongdoing. See *id.,* at 492. Pp. 12–14.

224 F. 3d 95, reversed and remanded.

GINSBURG, J., delivered the opinion for a unanimous Court.