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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

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BOOTH *v.* CHURNER ET AL.CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR
THE THIRD CIRCUIT

No. 99–1964. Argued March 20, 2001— Decided May 29, 2001

The Prison Litigation Reform Act of 1995 amended 42 U. S. C. §1997e(a), which now requires a prisoner to exhaust “such administrative remedies as are available” before suing over prison conditions. Petitioner Booth was a Pennsylvania state prison inmate when he began this 42 U. S. C. §1983 action in Federal District Court, claiming that respondent corrections officers violated his Eighth Amendment right to be free from cruel and unusual punishment by assaulting him, using excessive force against him, and denying him medical attention to treat ensuing injuries. He sought various forms of injunctive relief and money damages. At the time, Pennsylvania provided an administrative grievance and appeals system, which addressed Booth’s complaints but had no provision for recovery of money damages. Before resorting to federal court, Booth filed an administrative grievance, but did not seek administrative review after the prison authority denied relief. Booth’s failure to appeal administratively led the District Court to dismiss the complaint without prejudice for failure to exhaust administrative remedies under §1997e(a). The Third Circuit affirmed, rejecting Booth’s argument that the exhaustion requirement is inapposite to his case because the administrative process could not award him the monetary relief he sought (money then being the only relief still requested).

Held: Under 42 U. S. C. §1997e(a), an inmate seeking only money damages must complete any prison administrative process capable of addressing the inmate’s complaint and providing some form of relief, even if the process does not make specific provision for monetary relief. The meaning of the phrase “administrative remedies . . . available” is the crux of the case. Neither the practical considerations urged by the parties nor their reliance on the dictionary meanings of

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the words “remedies” and “available” are conclusive in seeking congressional intent. Clearer clues are found in two considerations. First, the broader statutory context in which Congress referred to “available” “remedies” indicates that exhaustion is required regardless of the relief offered through administrative procedures. While the modifier “available” requires the possibility of some relief for the action complained of, the word “exhausted” has a decidedly procedural emphasis. It makes no sense, for instance, to demand that someone exhaust “such administrative [redress]” as is available; one “exhausts” processes, not forms of relief, and the statute provides that one must. Second, statutory history confirms the suggestion that Congress meant to require procedural exhaustion regardless of the fit between a prisoner’s prayer for relief and the administrative remedies possible. Before §1997e(a) was amended by the 1995 Act, a court had discretion (though no obligation) to require a state inmate to exhaust “such . . . remedies as are available,” but only if they were “plain, speedy, and effective.” That scheme is now a thing of the past, for the amendments eliminated both the discretion to dispense with administrative exhaustion and the condition that the remedy be “plain, speedy, and effective” before exhaustion could be required. The significance of deleting that condition is apparent in light of *McCarthy v. Madigan*, 503 U. S. 140. In holding that the preamended version of §1997e(a) did not require exhaustion by those seeking only money damages when money was unavailable at the administrative level, *id.*, at 149–151, the *McCarthy* Court reasoned in part that only a procedure able to provide money damages would be “effective” within the statute’s meaning, *id.*, at 150. It has to be significant that Congress removed the very term, “effective,” the *McCarthy* Court had previously emphasized in reaching the result Booth now seeks, and the fair inference to be drawn is that Congress meant to preclude the *McCarthy* result. Congress’s imposition of an obviously broader exhaustion requirement makes it highly implausible that it meant to give prisoners a strong inducement to skip the administrative process simply by limiting prayers for relief to money damages not offered through administrative grievance mechanisms. Pp. 3–9.

206 F. 3d 289, affirmed.

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