

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
SOUTHERN DIVISION

MICHAEL JONES,

Plaintiff,

Case No. 1:24-cv-217

v.

Honorable Jane M. Beckering

PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF MICHIGAN
et al.,

Defendants.

OPINION

This is a civil rights action brought by a state prisoner under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The Court has granted Plaintiff leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* in a separate order. Under the Prison Litigation Reform Act, Pub. L. No. 104-134, 110 Stat. 1321 (1996) (PLRA), the Court is required to dismiss any prisoner action brought under federal law if the complaint is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2), 1915A; 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The Court must read Plaintiff's *pro se* complaint indulgently, *see Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972), and accept Plaintiff's allegations as true, unless they are clearly irrational or wholly incredible. *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 33 (1992). Applying these standards, the Court will dismiss Plaintiff's complaint for failure to state a claim and as frivolous.

Discussion

I. Factual Allegations

Plaintiff is presently incarcerated with the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) at the Richard A. Handlon Correctional Facility (MTU) in Ionia, Ionia County, Michigan. The

events about which he complains occurred at that facility, the Ingham County Correctional Facility in Mason, Michigan, and the Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility (IBC) in Ionia, Ionia County, Michigan. Plaintiff sues the People of the State of Michigan, the Ingham County Jail, and the MDOC.

In his complaint, Plaintiff asserts that he is “psychic with Government literature to run for president,” and that he has “resources and [has] spoken with DEA and ATF telepathically.” (ECF No. 1, PageID.11.) Plaintiff states that in March of 2020, while at the Ingham County Jail, his packing slip for his property was lost or stolen and he never received a copy. (*Id.*, PageID.5–7.) Plaintiff’s “resources [told him] that a woman by the name of Sara Pulson was seen on camera stealing [Plaintiff’s] property. (*Id.*, PageID.7) Plaintiff states that Pulson is a deputy and an ATF agent. (*Id.*)

Plaintiff next alleges that in November or December of 2023, while at IBC, his Goliath Book was taken from his property by staff. (*Id.*, PageID.6–7.) Plaintiff states that his “reading tells [him] that a DEA badge took [his] Peep Show Goliath book,” and that he believes the incident was caught on camera. (*Id.*, PageID.7.) Plaintiff further alleges that while confined at MTU in January and February of 2024, staff refused to give him one meal and stole green shorts and a thermal shirt from his area of control. (*Id.*, PageID.6–7.)

Plaintiff claims that Defendants violated his rights under the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments. (*Id.*, PageID.5.) Plaintiff seeks damages. (*Id.*, PageID.8.)

II. Failure to State a Claim

A complaint may be dismissed for failure to state a claim if it fails “to give the defendant fair notice of what the . . . claim is and the grounds upon which it rests.” *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007) (quoting *Conley v. Gibson*, 355 U.S. 41, 47 (1957)). While a complaint need not contain detailed factual allegations, a plaintiff’s allegations must include more than labels

and conclusions. *Id.*; *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (“Threadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice.”). The court must determine whether the complaint contains “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 570. “A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 679. Although the plausibility standard is not equivalent to a “‘probability requirement,’ . . . it asks for more than a sheer possibility that a defendant has acted unlawfully.” *Id.* at 678 (quoting *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 556). “[W]here the well-pleaded facts do not permit the court to infer more than the mere possibility of misconduct, the complaint has alleged—but it has not ‘show[n]’—that the pleader is entitled to relief.” *Id.* at 679 (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2)); *see also Hill v. Lappin*, 630 F.3d 468, 470–71 (6th Cir. 2010) (holding that the *Twombly/Iqbal* plausibility standard applies to dismissals of prisoner cases on initial review under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915A(b)(1) and 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii)).

To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege the violation of a right secured by the federal Constitution or laws and must show that the deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law. *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); *Street v. Corr. Corp. of Am.*, 102 F.3d 810, 814 (6th Cir. 1996). Because § 1983 is a method for vindicating federal rights, not a source of substantive rights itself, the first step in an action under § 1983 is to identify the specific constitutional right allegedly infringed. *Albright v. Oliver*, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994).

A. People of State of Michigan and MDOC as Defendants

Plaintiff names the People of the State of Michigan as a Defendant in this case. The Court construes such a claim as one against the State of Michigan itself. *McLittle v. O'Brien*, 974 F.

Supp. 635, 637 (E.D. Mich. 1997), *aff'd*, 172 F.3d 49 (6th Cir. 1998). Plaintiff also names the MDOC as a Defendant. Plaintiff may not maintain a § 1983 action against these Defendants. Regardless of the form of relief requested, the states and their departments are immune under the Eleventh Amendment from suit in the federal courts, unless the state has waived immunity or Congress has expressly abrogated Eleventh Amendment immunity by statute. *See Pennhurst State Sch. & Hosp. v. Halderman*, 465 U.S. 89, 98–101 (1984); *Alabama v. Pugh*, 438 U.S. 781, 782 (1978); *O'Hara v. Wigginton*, 24 F.3d 823, 826 (6th Cir. 1994). Congress has not expressly abrogated Eleventh Amendment immunity by statute, *Quern v. Jordan*, 440 U.S. 332, 341 (1979), and the State of Michigan has not consented to civil rights suits in federal court. *Abick v. Michigan*, 803 F.2d 874, 877 (6th Cir. 1986). In numerous opinions, the Sixth Circuit has specifically held that the MDOC is absolutely immune from a § 1983 suit under the Eleventh Amendment. *See, e.g., Harrison v. Michigan*, 722 F.3d 768, 771 (6th Cir. 2013); *Diaz v. Mich. Dep't of Corr.*, 703 F.3d 956, 962 (6th Cir. 2013); *McCoy v. Michigan*, 369 F. App'x 646, 653–54 (6th Cir. 2010). In addition, the State of Michigan (acting through the MDOC) is not a “person” who may be sued under § 1983 for money damages. *See Lapidus v. Bd. of Regents*, 535 U.S. 613, 617 (2002) (citing *Will v. Mich. Dep't of State Police*, 491 U.S. 58, 66 (1989)); *Harrison*, 722 F.3d at 771. Therefore, the Court dismisses the People of the State of Michigan and the MDOC.

B. Ingham County Jail as Defendant

Plaintiff sues the Ingham County Jail. The jail is a building, not an entity capable of being sued in its own right. However, construing Plaintiff's *pro se* complaint with all required liberality, *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972), the Court assumes that Plaintiff intended to sue Ingham County. Ingham County may not be held vicariously liable for the actions of its employees under § 1983. *See Connick v. Thompson*, 563 U.S. 51, 60 (2011); *City of Canton v. Harris*, 489

U.S. 378, 392 (1989); *Monell v. Dep't of Soc. Servs.*, 436 U.S. 658, 694 (1978). Instead, a county is liable only when its official policy or custom causes the injury. *Connick*, 563 U.S. at 60.

Plaintiff states that his rights were violated when an employee or employees at Ingham County Jail failed to provide a packing slip or to keep track of his property. Plaintiff also asserts that sources told him that a deputy by the name of Sara Pulson was seen on camera stealing his property. Plaintiff's allegations against the county essentially rest on a theory of vicarious liability and therefore do not state a claim. *Id.* Plaintiff does not allege any facts suggesting the existence of a custom of unlawful execution and enforcement of search warrants. As the Supreme Court has instructed, to demonstrate that a municipality had an unlawful custom, a plaintiff must show that the municipality was deliberately indifferent to "practices so persistent and widespread as to practically have the force of law." *Id.* Plaintiff cites no prior incidents demonstrating a widespread pattern. Conclusory allegations of unconstitutional conduct without specific factual allegations fail to state a claim under § 1983. *See Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678; *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555 (2007). Plaintiff therefore fails to state a claim against Ingham County. Accordingly, the Court will dismiss the Ingham County Jail.

C. *Parratt* Doctrine

Moreover, Plaintiff's underlying due process claims are barred by the doctrine of *Parratt v. Taylor*, 451 U.S. 527 (1981), *overruled in part by Daniels v. Williams*, 474 U.S. 327 (1986). Under *Parratt*, a person deprived of property by a "random and unauthorized act" of a state employee has no federal due process claim unless the state fails to afford an adequate post-deprivation remedy. If an adequate post-deprivation remedy exists, the deprivation, although real, is not "without due process of law." *Parratt*, 451 U.S. at 537. This rule applies to both negligent and intentional deprivations of property, as long as the deprivation was not done pursuant to an

established state procedure. *See Hudson v. Palmer*, 468 U.S. 517, 530–36 (1984). Because Plaintiff’s claim is premised upon allegedly unauthorized acts of a state official, he must plead and prove the inadequacy of state post-deprivation remedies. *See Copeland v. Machulis*, 57 F.3d 476, 479–80 (6th Cir. 1995); *Gibbs v. Hopkins*, 10 F.3d 373, 378 (6th Cir. 1993). Under settled Sixth Circuit authority, a prisoner’s failure to sustain this burden requires dismissal of his § 1983 due-process action. *See Brooks v. Dutton*, 751 F.2d 197 (6th Cir. 1985).

Here, Plaintiff has not alleged that state post-deprivation remedies are inadequate. Moreover, numerous state post-deprivation remedies are available to him. First, a prisoner who incurs a loss through no fault of his own may petition the institution’s Prisoner Benefit Fund for compensation. MDOC Policy Directive 04.07.112, ¶ B (eff. Oct. 2, 2023); MDOC Policy Directive 04.02.110, ¶ E (eff. Nov. 1, 2017). Aggrieved prisoners may also submit claims for property loss of less than \$1,000 to the State Administrative Board. Mich. Comp. Laws § 600.6419; MDOC Policy Directive 03.02.131 (eff. Mar. 27, 2017). Alternatively, Michigan law authorizes actions in the Court of Claims asserting tort or contract claims “against the state and any of its departments or officers.” Mich. Comp. Laws § 600.6419(1)(a) (eff. Nov. 12, 2013). The Sixth Circuit specifically has held that Michigan provides adequate post-deprivation remedies for deprivation of property. *See Copeland*, 57 F.3d at 480. Plaintiff does not allege any reason why a state-court action would not afford him complete relief for the deprivation, either negligent or intentional, of his personal property. Accordingly, Plaintiff’s Fourteenth Amendment due process claims will be dismissed.

D. Eighth Amendment

Plaintiff contends that he was deprived of a meal while confined at MTU in February of 2024. This allegation implicates the protections of the Eighth Amendment. “The Eighth

Amendment imposes a duty on officials to provide ‘humane conditions of confinement,’ including insuring, among other things, that prisoners receive adequate . . . food” *Young ex rel. Estate of Young v. Martin*, 51 F. App’x 509, 513 (6th Cir. 2002) (quoting *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 832 (1994)). The Constitution “does not mandate comfortable prisons.” *Rhodes v. Chapman*, 452 U.S. 337, 349 (1981). “Not every unpleasant experience a prisoner might endure while incarcerated constitutes cruel and unusual punishment within the meaning of the Eighth Amendment.” *Ivey v. Wilson*, 832 F.2d 950, 954 (6th Cir. 1987) (per curiam). Thus, the deprivation of a few meals for a limited time generally does not rise to the level of an Eighth Amendment violation. See *Cunningham v. Jones*, 667 F.2d 565, 566 (6th Cir. 1982) (per curiam) (providing a prisoner only one meal per day for fifteen days did not violate the Eighth Amendment, because the meals provided contained sufficient nutrition to sustain normal health); *Davis v. Miron*, 502 F. App’x 569, 570 (6th Cir. 2012) (denial of seven meals over six days is not an Eighth Amendment violation); *Richmond v. Settles*, 450 F. App’x 448, 456 (6th Cir. 2011) (denial of five meals over three consecutive days, and a total of seven meals over six consecutive days, does not rise to Eighth Amendment violation, where the prisoner fails to allege that his health suffered); see also *Berry v. Brady*, 192 F.3d 504, 507–08 (5th Cir. 1999) (denial of a few meals over several months does not state a claim); *Staten v. Terhune*, 67 F. App’x 462, 462–63 (9th Cir. 2003) (deprivation of two meals is not sufficiently serious to form the basis of an Eighth Amendment claim); *Cagle v. Perry*, No. 9:04-CV-1151, 2007 WL 3124806, at *14 (N.D.N.Y. Oct. 24, 2007) (deprivation of two meals is “not sufficiently numerous, prolonged or severe” to give rise to an Eighth Amendment claim). Plaintiff’s allegation that he was deprived of one meal falls short of stating a claim under the objective prong of the deliberate-indifference standard. Consequently, Plaintiff does not state a

plausible Eighth Amendment claim. *See Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 679 (noting that the allegations must permit an inference of more than a “mere possibility” of misconduct).

III. Duplicative Filing

In addition to the above-discussed reasons for dismissal of this action, Plaintiff’s action is subject to dismissal as duplicative of a prior case filed by Plaintiff, which remains pending in this Court.

Plaintiffs generally have “no right to maintain two separate actions involving the same subject matter at the same time in the same court and against the same defendants.” *Walton v. Eaton Corp.*, 563 F.2d 66, 70 (3d Cir. 1977) (citations omitted). Accordingly, as part of its inherent power to administer its docket, a district court may dismiss a suit that is duplicative of another federal court suit. *See Colo. River Water Conservation Dist. v. United States*, 424 U.S. 800, 817 (1976); *Missouri v. Prudential Health Care Plan, Inc.*, 259 F.3d 949, 953–54 (8th Cir. 2001); *Curtis v. Citibank, N.A.*, 226 F.3d 133, 138–39 (2d Cir. 2000); *Smith v. SEC*, 129 F.3d 356, 361 (6th Cir. 1997). The power to dismiss a duplicative lawsuit is meant to foster judicial economy and the “comprehensive disposition of litigation,” *Kerotest Mfg. Co. v. C-O-Two Fire Equip. Co.*, 342 U.S. 180, 183 (1952), and protect parties from “the vexation of concurrent litigation over the same subject matter.” *Adam v. Jacobs*, 950 F.2d 89, 93 (2d Cir. 1991).

In addition, courts have held that a complaint that merely repeats pending or previously litigated claims may be dismissed on PLRA screening as frivolous or malicious. *See, e.g., McWilliams v. State of Colo.*, 121 F.3d 573, 574 (10th Cir. 1997) (holding that repetitious litigation of virtually identical causes of action may be dismissed as frivolous or malicious); *Cato v. United States*, 70 F.3d 1103, 1105 n.2 (9th Cir. 1995) (noting that an action may be dismissed as frivolous when the complaint “merely repeats pending or previously litigated claims” (citations omitted)); *Pittman v. Moore*, 980 F.2d 994, 994–95 (5th Cir. 1993) (finding that it is “malicious” to file a

lawsuit that duplicates allegations of another pending federal lawsuit by the same plaintiff); *Bailey v. Johnson*, 846 F.2d 1019, 1021 (5th Cir. 1988) (holding that it was appropriate to dismiss a civil rights suit by a prison inmate where the suit was duplicative of facts and allegations made in a previously dismissed suit, and merely named a different defendant whose actions formed a partial basis for the previous suit); *Hahn v. Tarnow*, No. 06-cv-12814, 2006 WL 2160934, at *3–7 (E.D. Mich. July 31, 2006).

A complaint is duplicative and subject to dismissal if the claims, parties, and available relief do not significantly differ from an earlier-filed action. *See Serlin v. Arthur Andersen & Co.*, 3 F.3d 221, 223 (7th Cir. 1993). Although complaints may not “significantly differ,” they need not be identical. Courts focus on the substance of the complaint. *See, e.g., Bailey*, 846 F.2d at 1021 (holding that a complaint was duplicative although different defendants were named because it “repeat[ed] the same factual allegations” asserted in the earlier case).

Here, Plaintiff’s claims regarding the loss of his property in March of 2020, November or December of 2023, and January or February of 2024, and the denial of a meal in February of 2024 are presented in Plaintiff’s prior action, which is pending in this Court: *Jones v. MDOC et al.*, No. 1:24-cv-120 (W.D. Mich.),¹

Considering the substantial similarities between the legal claims and factual allegations in the present action and in Plaintiff’s prior action, the Court concludes that the present complaint is duplicative of Plaintiff’s prior complaint with regard to all of Plaintiff’s present claims. Therefore, pursuant to the Court’s inherent power and the screening provisions of the PLRA, Plaintiff’s

¹ In action no. 1:24-cv-120, Plaintiff does not name the People of the State of Michigan, the Ingham County Jail, or the MDOC as defendants. *See Am. Compl., Jones v. MDOC et al. Jones v. MDOC et al.*, No. 1:24-cv-120 (W.D. Mich. Mar. 11, 2024), (ECF No. 7). However, the facts underlying the claims presented in the instant action are identical to the claims presented in action no. 1:24-cv-120.

complaint is subject to dismissal on the grounds that it is wholly duplicative and, therefore, frivolous.

Conclusion

The Court will grant Plaintiff leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*. Further, having conducted the review required by the Prison Litigation Reform Act, the Court determines that Plaintiff's complaint will be dismissed for failure to state a claim and as frivolous under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b), and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The Court must next decide whether an appeal of this action would be in good faith within the meaning of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3). *See McGore v. Wrigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601, 611 (6th Cir. 1997). For the same reasons the Court concludes that Plaintiff's claims are properly dismissed, the Court also concludes that any issue Plaintiff might raise on appeal would be frivolous. *Coppedge v. United States*, 369 U.S. 438, 445 (1962). Accordingly, the Court certifies that an appeal would not be taken in good faith.

This is a dismissal as described by 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).

A judgment consistent with this opinion will be entered.

Dated: April 9, 2024

/s/ Jane M. Beckering
Jane M. Beckering
United States District Judge