

[Cite as *Watley v. Ohio Dept. of Rehab. & Corr.*, 2005-Ohio-1392.]

IN THE COURT OF CLAIMS OF OHIO

RAYSHAN WATLEY	:	
Plaintiff	:	
v.	:	CASE NO. 2004-09479-AD
DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION AND CORRECTION	:	<u>MEMORANDUM DECISION</u>
Defendant	:	

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FINDINGS OF FACT

{¶ 1} 1) On August 3, 2004, plaintiff, Rayshan Watley, an inmate incarcerated at defendant's Southern Ohio Correctional Facility ("SOCF"), was transferred to a segregation unit.

{¶ 2} 2) Incident to the transfer, plaintiff's personal property was delivered into the custody of SOCF staff. Plaintiff explained his property items were packed into three plastic tubs and sent to the SOCF property vault.

{¶ 3} 3) Plaintiff related that when he was released from segregation he regained possession of his property. However, plaintiff asserted SOCF personnel returned only two tubs of his property and not the third. According to plaintiff, the missing third tub contained a pair of gym shoes, a pair of shorts, one towel, and criminal trial transcripts. Consequently, plaintiff filed this complaint seeking to recover the replacement cost of the alleged missing property items contained in the third tub. Plaintiff was not required to pay the filing fee.

{¶ 4} 4) Defendant maintained all of plaintiff's personal property was returned to his possession when he was released from segregation. Defendant insisted plaintiff's gym shoes, shorts,

towels, and legal work were all returned. Defendant suggested plaintiff's property arrived at the SOCF property vault in three tubs and was then repackaged in two tubs to save shelf space.

{¶ 5} 5) Defendant submitted a copy of plaintiff's property inventory compiled on August 3, 2004. This inventory notes plaintiff's property was packed in three boxes and listed five towels, a pair of gym shoes, four pairs of undershorts, and various documents described as "letters" and "papers." One towel and two pairs of undershorts were designated as part of plaintiff's "J-2" bag which contained additional property items and was taken to plaintiff while he was housed in segregation. An additional property inventory dated August 7, 2004, includes a pair of sport shoes, four towels, three pairs of undershorts, and various letters and papers. This inventory contains the notation, "unable to determine current legal work at this time." Plaintiff signed this inventory form acknowledging all the listed property items had been returned to his possession.

{¶ 6} 6) Plaintiff, in his response to defendant's investigation report, related when he was taken to segregation on August 3, 2004, he was wearing a pair of Nike Air gym shoes and a pair of gym shorts which were turned over to an SOCF employee. Plaintiff further related these gym shoes and gym shorts were never recorded on his August 3, 2004, property inventory and were never returned to his possession. Plaintiff claimed he possessed two pairs of gym shoes. Additionally, plaintiff insisted his towel and trial transcripts were not returned to him after he left the segregation unit. Plaintiff contested defendant's assertion regarding his property being repackaged from three tubs to two. Plaintiff professed he possessed far too much property to fit into two containers. Plaintiff pointed out that both of his property inventories compiled by defendant on August 3, 2004, and August 7,

2004, note the property items had been stored in three containers. Plaintiff speculated the third tub containing his trial transcripts and towel, "got lost some where from being packed up and brought to the pack up room."

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

{¶ 7} 1) This court in *Mullett v. Department of Correction* (1976), 76-0292-AD, held that defendant does not have the liability of an insurer (i.e., is not liable without fault) with respect to inmate property, but that it does have the duty to make "reasonable attempts to protect, or recover" such property.

{¶ 8} 2) Although not strictly responsible for a prisoner's property, defendant had at least the duty of using the same degree of care as it would use with its own property. *Henderson v. Southern Ohio Correctional Facility* (1979), 76-0356-AD.

{¶ 9} 3) Plaintiff has the burden of proving, by a preponderance of the evidence, that he suffered a loss and that this loss was proximately caused by defendant's negligence. *Barnum v. Ohio State University* (1977), 76-0368-AD.

{¶ 10} 4) Plaintiff must produce evidence which affords a reasonable basis for the conclusion defendant's conduct is more likely than not a substantial factor in bringing about the harm. *Parks v. Department of Rehabilitation and Correction* (1985), 85-01546-AD.

{¶ 11} 5) In order to recover against a defendant in a tort action, if plaintiff produces evidence which furnishes a basis for only a guess, among different possibilities, as to any essential issues in the case, he fails to sustain the burden as to such issue. *Landon v. Lee Motors, Inc.* (1954), 161 Ohio St. 82.

{¶ 12} 6) The credibility of witnesses and the weight attributable to their testimony are primarily matters for the trier of fact. *State v. DeHass* (1967), 10 Ohio St. 2d 230, paragraph one

of the syllabus. The court is free to believe or disbelieve, all or any part of each witness's testimony. *State v. Anthill* (1964), 176 Ohio St. 61.

{¶ 13} 7) Plaintiff has failed to prove, by a preponderance of the evidence, he sustained any loss as a result of any negligence on the part of defendant. *Fitzgerald v. Department of Rehabilitation and Correction* (1998), 97-10146-AD.

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 v. : CASE NO. 2004-09479-AD
 DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION : ENTRY OF ADMINISTRATIVE
 AND CORRECTION : DETERMINATION
 Defendant :
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Having considered all the evidence in the claim file and, for the reasons set forth in the memorandum decision filed concurrently herewith, judgment is rendered in favor of defendant. Court costs are assessed against plaintiff. The clerk shall serve upon all parties notice of this judgment and its date of entry upon the journal.

DANIEL R. BORCHERT
 Deputy Clerk

Entry cc:

Rayshan Watley, #347-921 Plaintiff, Pro se

P.O. Box 45699
Lucasville, Ohio 45699

Gregory C. Trout, Chief Counsel For Defendant
Department of Rehabilitation
and Correction
1050 Freeway Drive North
Columbus, Ohio 43229

DRB/RDK/laa
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