

NOTICE: NOT FOR OFFICIAL PUBLICATION.
UNDER ARIZONA RULE OF THE SUPREME COURT 111(c), THIS DECISION IS NOT PRECEDENTIAL
AND MAY BE CITED ONLY AS AUTHORIZED BY RULE.

IN THE
ARIZONA COURT OF APPEALS
DIVISION ONE

IKEMEFULA CHARLES IBEABUCHI, *Plaintiff/Appellant*,

v.

JAMES T. BLOMO, *Defendant/Appellee*.

No. 1 CA-CV 17-0776
FILED 9-20-2018

Appeal from the Superior Court in Maricopa County
No. CV 2017-011312
The Honorable Margaret R. Mahoney, Judge

AFFIRMED

COUNSEL

Ikemefula Charles Ibeabuchi, Florence
Plaintiff/Appellant

Arizona Attorney General's Office, Phoenix
By Cynthia D. Starkey
Counsel for Defendant/Appellee

MEMORANDUM DECISION

Judge Michael J. Brown delivered the decision of the Court, in which
Presiding Judge James P. Beene and Judge James B. Morse Jr. joined.

IBEABUCHI v. BLOMO
Decision of the Court

B R O W N, Judge:

¶1 Ikemefula Charles Ibeabuchi appeals the superior court’s judgment granting Judge James T. Blomo’s motion to dismiss. Because Judge Blomo’s allegedly tortious actions are protected by judicial immunity, we affirm.

BACKGROUND

¶2 In 2014, Ibeabuchi filed a complaint against attorney Sabinus A. Megwa alleging legal malpractice and requesting that Judge Blomo issue an order terminating Megwa’s services. According to Ibeabuchi, Judge Blomo denied the request in an unsigned minute entry. Ibeabuchi appealed from the minute entry, but the appeal was dismissed by this court for lack of jurisdiction. Several years later, he filed a second appeal, arising out of Judge Blomo’s denial of a motion for reconsideration. The second appeal was deemed abandoned for failure to pay filing fees.

¶3 Ibeabuchi filed a complaint against Judge Blomo, alleging the court orders “formed the basis” for an intentional tort and that Ibeabuchi suffered a violation of his constitutional rights. He also claimed damages of \$50,000. In lieu of filing an answer, Judge Blomo sought dismissal of the complaint under Arizona Rule of Civil Procedure (“Rule”) 12(b)(6) asserting, among other arguments, that the doctrine of judicial immunity barred Ibeabuchi’s claims.

¶4 Ibeabuchi did not specifically respond to Judge Blomo’s motion, but instead filed two documents titled “Acknowledgement” and “Notice of Claim Statute, At-Law.” In his reply, Judge Blomo requested summary disposition of the motion under Rule 7.1(b)(2), but alternatively argued that even assuming Ibeabuchi timely responded, dismissal was still appropriate. The superior court entered a final, appealable judgment in favor of Judge Blomo, and Ibeabuchi timely appealed.

DISCUSSION

¶5 We review the dismissal of a claim under Rule 12(b)(6) de novo. *Coleman v. City of Mesa*, 230 Ariz. 352, 356, ¶ 7 (2012). We assume all well-pled facts alleged are true and will not affirm the dismissal unless, as a matter of law, the plaintiff is not “entitled to relief under any interpretation of the facts susceptible of proof.” *Fid. Sec. Life Ins. Co. v. State, Dep’t of Ins.*, 191 Ariz. 222, 224, ¶ 4 (1998) (citation omitted). Because we find the issue of judicial immunity dispositive, we need not address other assertions raised by the parties.

IBEABUCHI v. BLOMO
Decision of the Court

¶6 Judicial immunity is a common law doctrine recognized in both state and federal courts. *Acevedo v. Pima Cty. Adult Prob. Dep't*, 142 Ariz. 319, 321 (1984). The doctrine provides judges absolute civil immunity for their judicial acts, “even when such acts are in excess of their jurisdiction or are alleged to have been done maliciously or corruptly.” *Id.* at 321 (citation omitted).

¶7 The doctrine’s primary purpose is to safeguard the judiciary so “judges will perform their functions independently and without fear of personal consequences.” *Burk v. State*, 215 Ariz. 6, 12, ¶ 7 (App. 2007) (citation omitted); *see also Grimm v. Ariz. Bd. of Pardons & Paroles*, 115 Ariz. 260, 264–65 (1977) (discussing several policy reasons underlying the doctrine). “Whether judicial immunity exists is a legal question for the court.” *Burk*, 215 Ariz. at 9, ¶ 7 (citation omitted).

¶8 Simply stated, a judicial act is a “function normally performed by a judge, and to the expectations of the parties, *i.e.*, whether [the parties] dealt with the judge in his judicial capacity.” *Stump v. Sparkman*, 435 U.S. 349, 362 (1978). When determining whether a judicial act occurred, we focus on the function’s nature and relationship to the judicial process, instead of the act itself, because “an improper or erroneous act cannot be said to be normally performed by a judge.” *Burk*, 215 Ariz. at 12, ¶ 14 (quoting *Mireles v. Waco*, 502 U.S. 9, 12 (1991)). However, “[i]f judicial immunity means anything, it means that a judge ‘will not be deprived of immunity because the action he took was in error . . . or was in the excess of authority.’” *Id.* (quoting *Mireles*, 502 U.S. at 12–13 (internal citation omitted)).

¶9 Here, Judge Blomo denied Ibeabuchi’s motions by issuing orders confirming his decisions, which is a mandatory function and thus plainly falls under the category of a “function normally performed by a judge.” Moreover, Ibeabuchi filed the motions for the purpose of seeking a judicial determination, so there is no reasonable argument he was not expecting to deal with Judge Blomo in his official capacity.

¶10 Without citation to authority, Ibeabuchi asserts Judge Blomo “acted ministerially” when he denied Ibeabuchi’s motions and Judge Blomo “is burdened with the proof that his [a]ct which he sought immunity was made in good faith.” However, judicial immunity does not turn on whether a judge’s act was ministerial and done in good faith. Instead, because Ibeabuchi’s claims are based solely on Judge Blomo’s judicial acts, he is protected from civil suits “even when such acts are in excess of [his] jurisdiction or are alleged to have been done maliciously or corruptly,”

IBEABUCHI v. BLOMO
Decision of the Court

Acevedo, 142 Ariz. at 321 (citation omitted), or in error, *Burk*, 215 Ariz. at 12, ¶ 14 (quoting *Mireles*, 502 U.S. at 12-13). Thus, his judicial acts are protected by absolute judicial immunity and there is no interpretation of the alleged facts that would result in an alternate outcome.

CONCLUSION

¶11 For the foregoing reasons, we affirm the superior court's judgment.



AMY M. WOOD • Clerk of the Court
FILED: AA