

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
8 SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA  
9

10 Case No.: 3:15-cv-00176-GPC-WVG

11 **ORDER:**

12  
13 GREGORY SMITH,

14 Plaintiff,

15 **(1) GRANTING SUMMARY  
16 JUDGMENT IN FAVOR OF  
17 DEFENDANTS SHARPE AND  
18 COBB;**

19 v.

20 R. COBB; et al.,

21 Defendant.

22 **(2) DISMISSING WITHOUT  
23 PREJUDICE CLAIMS AGAINST  
24 DEFENDANTS DAROGLOU AND  
25 PEREZ;**

26 **(3) DENYING AS MOOT  
27 PLAINTIFF'S MOTION TO STRIKE  
28 [ECF No. 82]**

On March 2, 2018, this Court entered an order warning Plaintiff that it was considering entering summary judgment against Plaintiff with regard to his remaining claims that Defendants Sharpe and Cobb had violated his First Amendment right of access to courts. (ECF No. 87.) With respect to those claims, Plaintiff alleges that Sharpe and Cobb refused to process Plaintiff's prison grievances regarding prison officials' failure to return property taken from Plaintiff's cell. Plaintiff ultimately filed

1 suit in California Superior Court over the loss of his property, but that court dismissed  
2 Plaintiff's claims because Plaintiff failed to exhaust his administrative remedies.

3 In its order, the Court noted that there did not appear to be a causal connection  
4 between Sharpe and Cobb's actions and the dismissal of Plaintiff's state court suit. It  
5 explained:

6 A plaintiff asserting a § 1983 action must prove that the defendant's actions  
7 were the "actionable cause" of the injury of which the plaintiff complains.  
8 *Harper v. City of Los Angeles*, 533 F.3d 1010, 1026 (9th Cir. 2008). This  
9 "actionable cause" requirement includes both proximate and in-fact  
10 causation. *Id.* As to proximate cause, the governing inquiry is normally  
11 whether the constitutional violation was a foreseeable risk of the defendant's  
12 conduct, but it can also be "determined by the existence of intervening or  
13 superseding actual causes," which "have been held to prevent the direct  
14 causal connection required for liability." *Smith v. Harrington*, No. C 12-  
15 3533 LB, 2015 WL 1407292, at \*25 (N.D. Cal. Mar. 27, 2015).

16 Here, it does not appear that, even assuming Cobb and Sharpe's actions  
17 prevented Plaintiff from exhausting the 602 process, their actions were the  
18 proximate cause of the dismissal of Plaintiff's Superior Court property  
19 claim. Rather, the proximate cause of that dismissal appears to be Plaintiff's  
20 failure to comply with the exhaustion requirements of the California  
21 Government Claims Act (which do not involve the Form 602 process) or to  
22 argue that an applicable exemption from those requirements applied in his  
23 case.

24 As noted in the Superior Court's order dismissing Plaintiff's claims, the  
25 California Government Claims Act requires a plaintiff to exhaust his  
26 administrative remedies before bringing an action in Superior Court. *See*  
27 Cal. Gov. Code § 945.4 ("[N]o suit for money or damages may be brought  
28 against a public entity on a cause of action . . . until a written claim therefor  
has been presented to the public entity and has been acted upon by the board,  
or has been deemed to have been rejected by the board . . ."); *see also id.* §  
950.2. Such requirements apply to prisoners. *Id.* § 945.6(c). In the context  
of a state prisoner like Plaintiff, this claim must be made to the Victim  
Compensation and Government Claims Board (the "Board"). *See Dragasits*  
*v. Yu*, No. 3:16-cv-1998-BEN-JLB, 2017 WL 3141802, at \*17 (S.D. Cal.  
July 24, 2017). Crucially, the California Department of Corrections and  
Rehabilitation ("CDCR") administrative appeal review process—which  
involves Forms 602 and 22—is *not* the type of exhaustion required before  
filing a claim in Superior Court; it is a different process. In fact, the CDCR

1 administrative appeal review process is not a prerequisite for filing a claim  
2 before the Board. *See* MacKay, *The California State Prisoners Handbook*  
3 681 (The Prison Law Office, 4th ed. 2008) (“[I]n 2004, the Government  
4 Claims Board began requiring prisoners to exhaust the 602 process before  
5 filing a Government Claims Form. However, problems arose because  
6 prisoners’ administrative appeals frequently were not fully processed by the  
7 time of the six-month deadline for filing a Government Claims Board claim.  
8 Consequently, the Board rescinded this policy and no longer requires  
9 prisoners to complete the 602 appeal process before filing a Board of  
10 Control claim.”). There is no evidence before the Court (or allegation made)  
11 that Plaintiff filed a claim before the Board. Thus, based on the evidence  
12 before the Court, it appears that regardless of Cobb and Sharpe’s actions, the  
13 Superior Court would still have dismissed Plaintiff’s claims in light of his  
14 failure to file a claim before the Board. *See Dragasits*, 2017 3141802, at  
15 [\*]17 (dismissing claim because the complaint failed “to allege facts  
16 demonstrating or excusing compliance with the claim presentation  
17 requirement of the California Government Claims Act”); *King v. Chokatos*,  
18 No. 1:12-cv-1936-LJO-GSA-PC, 2014 WL 3362237, at \*5 (E.D. Cal. July 9,  
19 2014) (“Compliance with the Government Claims Act is an element of the  
20 cause of action, is required, and a failure to file a claim is fatal to a cause of  
21 action.” (citations omitted)). In other words, it appears that it was Plaintiff’s  
22 failure to file a claim before the Board that was the “actionable cause” of the  
23 dismissal of his Superior Court suit.

17 Moreover, even if Sharpe and Cobb somehow prevented Plaintiff from  
18 properly bringing a claim before the Board, there were arguments available  
19 to Plaintiff that he was excused from compliance with the Government  
20 Claims Act. For example, equitable estoppel prevents public entities and  
21 officials from “asserting plaintiff’s noncompliance with the claims-  
22 presentation statutes.” *Christopher P. v. Mojave Unified Sch. Dist.*, 23 Cal.  
23 Rptr. 2d353, 356 (Ct. App. 1993); *see also John R. v. Oakland Unified Sch.*  
24 *Dist.*, 769 P.2d 948, 951 (Cal. 1989) (“It is well settled that a public entity  
25 may be estopped from asserting the limitations of the claims statute where  
26 its agents or employees have prevented or deterred the filing of a timely  
27 claim by some affirmative act.”). Thus, in the Superior Court action,  
28 Plaintiff also had a viable response to the defendants’ exhaustion-based  
demurrer. In that event, it was Plaintiff’s failure to offer an available  
argument that caused the dismissal of the Superior Court action, not the  
actions of Cobb or Sharpe.

27 (*Id.* at 6–8.) The Court instructed Plaintiff to respond to this issue within 21 days.

28 The Court separately noted that neither Defendant Daroglou nor Defendant Perez

1 had been served process in this case. (*Id.* at 8.) Because the deadline for service under  
2 Federal Rule of Procedure 4(m) had long passed by the date of the Court’s order, the  
3 Court ordered Plaintiff to show cause why his claims against those defendants should not  
4 be dismissed for failure to serve. (*Id.* at 9.)

5 With respect to both issues, the Court warned Plaintiff that failure to respond  
6 properly “may result in the dismissal of the remaining claims in this action.” (*Id.*)  
7 Plaintiff filed a response addressing both issues. (ECF No. 88.)

### 8 **I. Causation Issue**

9 Plaintiff responds to the Court’s summary judgment discussion by asserting that he  
10 diligently exhausted his administrative remedies. He identifies two actions he took to  
11 exhaust his remedies: (1) filing several Form 602s and Form 22s with CDCR officials,  
12 and (2) filing a claim with the California Victims Compensation and Government Claims  
13 Board (the “Board”). (ECF No. 88 at 4–5.) As discussed in the Court’s previous order,  
14 the CDCR’s appeal process—which involves Forms 602 and 22—is not a part of the  
15 Government Claims Act’s exhaustion requirement. Thus, the only relevant question is  
16 whether Plaintiff filed (or attempted to file) a claim with the Board regarding his property  
17 prior to filing his state court suit.

18 Plaintiff offers a copy of a claim he filed with the Board, which is dated March 28,  
19 2011. (*See* ECF No. 88, Ex. C at 1–2.) That claim asserts that he should receive  
20 \$3,000,000 for his injuries resulting from an assault by his cellmate. In the box where  
21 Plaintiff was instructed to list the “specific damage or injury,” Plaintiff wrote: “Broken  
22 left shoulder. Damage left eye. 2 puncture wounds upper lip, left wrist. 2nd degree  
23 burns to 10/15 percent of my back and right arm with hot water and oil.” (*Id.*) This  
24 claim cannot serve as an attempt to exhaust Plaintiff’s property-based claim because  
25 nothing in it discussed Plaintiff’s property. Rather, Plaintiff’s claim to the Board  
26 discussed only his *personal injuries*. Plaintiff offers no other evidence suggesting that he  
27 made a property-based claim with the Board. Thus, no reasonable juror could conclude  
28 that Plaintiff exhausted his administrative remedies as to his property-based claim before

1 asserting that claim in state court.

2 Plaintiff's failure to offer evidence that he exhausted (or at least attempted to  
3 exhaust) his administrative remedies with respect to his property-based claim vitiates his  
4 argument that Sharpe's or Cobb's conduct caused the dismissal of his property-based  
5 claim in state court. There is no evidence suggesting that Sharpe or Cobb impeded  
6 Plaintiff's ability to file a claim with the Board *as to his property*. Because causation is  
7 an essential element of a § 1983 claim, *Harper*, 533 F.3d at 1026, it is a material fact.  
8 *See Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc.*, 477 U.S. 242, 248 (1986) (defining materiality as a  
9 fact "that might affect the outcome of the suit under the governing law"). Because there  
10 is no genuine dispute as to the material fact of causation, Sharpe and Cobb are entitled to  
11 summary judgment. Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(a).

## 12 **II. Timely Service**

13 With respect to his failure to serve Defendants Daroglou and Perez, Plaintiff argues  
14 that he has satisfied his obligations under Rule 4(m) by furnishing the United States  
15 Marshals Service with information sufficient to identify Daroglou's and Perez's  
16 "identities." (ECF No. 88 at 2.) The only evidence Plaintiff offers is a copy of a letter he  
17 wrote to the U.S. Marshals Office, dated March 12, 2018, asking that the office "look into  
18 your files a for a copy of your attempt to serve[], but was unsuccessful. Need these two  
19 cop[ies] for court exhibits." (ECF No. 88, Ex. D at 1.<sup>1</sup>)

20 "In cases involving plaintiffs proceeding in forma pauperis, the United States  
21 Marshal, upon order of the court, is authorized to serve the summons and the complaint."  
22 *Walker v. Sumner*, 14 F.3d 1415, 1422 (9th Cir. 1994) *overruled on other grounds by*  
23 *Sandin v. Conner*, 515 U.S. 472, 483–84 (1995). While an "incarcerated pro se plaintiff  
24 proceeding in forma pauperis is entitled to rely on the U.S. marshal for service of the  
25

---

26  
27 <sup>1</sup> Plaintiff also includes a copy of a letter sent to him by the Clerk of Court on July 13, 2015—after the  
28 Court granted Plaintiff's motion to proceed in forma pauperis—which instructed Plaintiff to complete  
the Form USM-285 "including the name and street address of the person you have named as a defendant  
and wish to serve, as completely and clearly as possible. (ECF No. 88, Ex. D at 2.)

1 summons and complaint,” the prisoner must offer the marshal sufficient information to  
2 serve the defendant. *Id.* If, in response to an order to show cause, the prisoner does “not  
3 prove that he provided the marshal with sufficient information to serve [the defendant] or  
4 that he in fact requested that [the defendant] be served,” dismissal is appropriate. *Id.*  
5 That said, however, a prisoner “should not be penalized by having his action dismissed  
6 for failure to effect service where the U.S. Marshal or the court clerk has failed to  
7 perform his duties.” *Id.* (quoting *Puett v. Blandford*, 912 F.2d 270, 275 (9th Cir. 1990)).

8 Here, the U.S. Marshal notified Plaintiff—on multiple occasions between August  
9 and October 2015—that the summonses sent to Daroglou and Perez were returned  
10 unexecuted because the litigation coordinator at Donovan Correctional Facility indicated  
11 that no one named “S. Daroglou,” “R. Prez,” or “R. Perez” was employed by the facility.  
12 (ECF Nos. 9, 10, 18, 30.) Plaintiff does not suggest that he responded to these notices at  
13 all, let alone by offering additional information that would assist the U.S. Marshal in  
14 finding Daroglou or Perez. Rather, he asserts that “[o]nce [a] state inmate suing prison  
15 officials in forma pauperis adequately identified defendants’ he [is] entitled to rely on  
16 [the] Marshals Service to serve and process, even if official was no longer employed by  
17 prison.” (ECF No. 88 at 2.) But while Plaintiff could rely on the Marshals Office to  
18 follow Plaintiff’s directions, he was obligated to provide some direction to the Marshals  
19 Office in the first place. Under this Court’s local civil rules:

20 Where service of a summons and pleading is to be made by United States  
21 marshal upon a person . . . the party at whose request the summons is issued  
22 is responsible for providing the United States marshal’s office *with*  
23 *appropriate instructions* regarding the person upon whom service is to be  
24 made, in what capacity the service is to be made (official or individual), and  
at *what address service is to be made*. Failure to comply with these  
instructions may cause the marshal not to perform service.

25 S.D. Cal. Civ. R. 4.1.c (emphases added). While Plaintiff could have sought assistance  
26 from the Court or the Marshals Office in obtaining Daroglou’s and Perez’s addresses, he  
27 instead chose to do nothing for two and a half years. By doing so, Plaintiff failed to  
28 comply with his obligation—under Local Rule 4.1.c—to instruct the Marshals Office on

1 how to proceed.

2       Because Plaintiff offers no reason to believe that he took any action until two and  
3 half years after he received notice from the U.S. Marshal that Defendant Daroglou and  
4 Perez could not be found, dismissal without prejudice for failure to serve under Rule  
5 4(m) is appropriate. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 4(m) (“If a defendant is not served within [120]  
6 days after the complaint is filed, the court—on . . . its own after notice to the plaintiff—  
7 must dismiss the action without prejudice against the defendant . . .”).

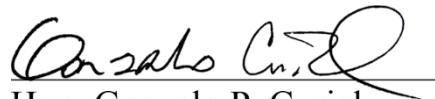
### 8       **III. Conclusion**

9       Having given Plaintiff notice that the Court was considering granting summary  
10 judgment in favor of Defendants Sharpe and Cobb because there was no evidence that  
11 those defendants’ actions caused the dismissal of Plaintiff’s state court claim regarding  
12 the loss of his property—and because Plaintiff has failed to respond with any evidence  
13 that could enable a reasonable juror to conclude otherwise—the Court finds that summary  
14 judgment should be entered in favor of Defendants Sharpe and Cobb on the remaining  
15 aspect of Plaintiff’s First Amendment access-to-courts claim. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(f)(2)  
16 (“After giving notice and a reasonable time to respond, the court may . . . grant the  
17 motion [for summary judgment] on grounds not raised by a party.”). Moreover, having  
18 given Plaintiff notice that it appeared that he had failed to serve Defendants Daroglou and  
19 Perez within the 120-day time limitation under Rule 4(m) effective at the time—and  
20 because Plaintiff does not suggest he took any action to serve those defendants within  
21 two and a half years after receiving notice that the U.S. Marshal could not find those  
22 defendants—the Court **DISMISSES WITHOUT PREJUDICE** Plaintiff’s claims against  
23 Defendants Daroglou and Perez. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 4(m).

24       This order resolves the remaining claims in this case. Plaintiff’s motion to strike  
25 (ECF No. 82) is **DENIED AS MOOT**. The Clerk of Court is respectfully requested to  
26 close the case.

27       **IT IS SO ORDERED.**

1 Dated: March 28, 2018

  
2 Hon. Gonzalo P. Curiel  
3 United States District Judge  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28