

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF DELAWARE**

WAYNE T. BAKER,	:	
	:	
Plaintiff,	:	
	:	
v.	:	Civ. No. 10-1144-LPS
	:	
DONALD FLAGG, et al.,	:	
	:	
Defendants.	:	

Wayne T. Baker, James T. Vaughn Correctional Center, Smyrna, Delaware, Pro Se Plaintiff.

MEMORANDUM OPINION

April 21, 2011
Wilmington, Delaware


STARK, U.S. District Judge:

I. INTRODUCTION

Plaintiff Wayne T. Baker (“Plaintiff”), filed this action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 alleging violations of his constitutional rights.¹ Plaintiff is housed at the James T. Vaughn Correctional Center (“VCC”) in Smyrna, Delaware. Plaintiff appears *pro se* and has been granted leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*. (D.I. 4) The Court proceeds to review and screen the Complaint pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915 and § 1915A.

II. BACKGROUND

Plaintiff filed a previous civil rights action against his cellmate Defendant Donald Flagg (“Flagg”) and the VCC after he was attacked by Flagg on Thursday, March 5, 2009.² *See Baker v. Glagg*, Civ. No. 10-482-LPS-MPT (D. Del. Sept. 30, 2010). The complaint was dismissed as frivolous and the matter is currently on appeal.

In addition to Flagg, Plaintiff names as defendants the VCC, the Delaware Department of Correction (“DOC”), Warden Perry Phelps (“Phelps”), First Correctional Medical (“FCM”), the Infirmary of the VCC (“Infirmary”), and the State of Delaware (“Delaware”). He alleges that the VCC refuses to provide him with documents relating to the attack and that he lives in a dangerous environment.

While not clear, it may be that Plaintiff seeks a transfer to a different prison facility. He also seeks compensatory damages. Subsequent to filing the Complaint, Plaintiff filed letter

¹Pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege that some person has deprived him of a federal right, and that the person who caused the deprivation acted under color of state law. *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988).

²In the first case, the cellmate was referred to as Donald Glagg, not Donald Flagg.

requests for the issuance of subpoenas directed to non-defendants Kent General Hospital and Sean O'Sullivan and to Defendant VCC. (D.I. 10, 11, 12, 15)

III. STANDARD OF REVIEW

This Court must dismiss, at the earliest practicable time, certain *in forma pauperis* and prisoner actions that are frivolous, malicious, fail to state a claim, or seek monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2) (*in forma pauperis* actions); 28 U.S.C. § 1915A (actions in which prisoner seeks redress from governmental defendant); 42 U.S.C. § 1997e (prisoner actions brought with respect to prison conditions). The Court must accept all factual allegations in a complaint as true and take them in the light most favorable to a *pro se* plaintiff. See *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. 89, 93 (2007); *Phillips v. County of Allegheny*, 515 F.3d 224, 229 (3d Cir. 2008). Because Plaintiff proceeds *pro se*, his pleading is liberally construed and his Complaint, “however inartfully pleaded, must be held to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers.” *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. at 94 (internal quotation marks omitted).

An action is frivolous if it “lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact.” *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989). Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(I) and § 1915A(b)(1), a court may dismiss a complaint as frivolous if it is “based on an indisputably meritless legal theory” or a “clearly baseless” or “fantastic or delusional” factual scenario. *Neitzke*, 490 at 327-28; *Wilson v. Rackmill*, 878 F.2d 772, 774 (3d Cir. 1989); see also, e.g., *Deutsch v. United States*, 67 F.3d 1080, 1091-92 (3d Cir. 1995) (holding frivolous a suit alleging that prison officials took inmate’s pen and refused to give it back).

The legal standard for dismissing a complaint for failure to state a claim pursuant to

§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) and § 1915A(b)(1) is identical to the legal standard used when ruling on Rule 12(b)(6) motions. *See Tourscher v. McCullough*, 184 F.3d 236, 240 (3d Cir. 1999). Before dismissing a complaint or claims for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted pursuant to the screening provisions of 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915 and 1915A, the Court must grant Plaintiff leave to amend his complaint, unless amendment would be inequitable or futile. *See Grayson v. Mayview State Hosp.*, 293 F.3d 103, 114 (3d Cir. 2002).

A well-pleaded complaint must contain more than mere labels and conclusions. *See Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, ___ U.S. ___, 129 S.Ct. 1937 (2009); *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544 (2007). The assumption of truth is inapplicable to legal conclusions or to “[t]hreadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action supported by mere conclusory statements.” *Iqbal*, 129 S.Ct. at 1949. When determining whether dismissal is appropriate, the Court conducts a two-part analysis. *See Fowler v. UPMC Shadyside*, 578 F.3d 203, 210 (3d Cir. 2009). First, the factual and legal elements of a claim are separated. *Id.* The Court must accept all of the Complaint’s well-pleaded facts as true, but may disregard any legal conclusions. *Id.* at 210-11. Second, the Court must determine whether the facts alleged in the Complaint are sufficient to show that the plaintiff has a “plausible claim for relief.” *Id.* at 211. In other words, the Complaint must do more than allege the plaintiff’s entitlement to relief; rather, it must “show” such an entitlement with its facts. *Id.* A claim is facially plausible when its factual content allows the Court to draw a reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged. *See Iqbal*, 129 S.Ct. at 1949. The plausibility standard “asks for more than a sheer possibility that a defendant has acted unlawfully.” *Id.* “Where a complaint pleads facts that are

‘merely consistent with’ a defendant’s liability, it ‘stops short of the line between possibility and plausibility of ‘entitlement to relief.’” *Id.* (quoting *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 570).

IV. DISCUSSION

A. State Actor

To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege “the violation of a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States and must show that the alleged deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law.” *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988). To act under “color of state law” a defendant must be “clothed with the authority of state law.” *Id.* at 49.

As discussed in Plaintiff’s first civil case, Flagg is not a State Actor. Flagg is an inmate who assaulted Plaintiff. He is not an individual “clothed with the authority of state law.” *See Reichley v. Pennsylvania Dep’t of Agric.*, 427 F.3d 236, 244-45 (3d Cir. 2005); *Biener v. Calio*, 361 F.3d 206, 216-17 (3d Cir. 2004). Plaintiff’s § 1983 claim against Flagg has no arguable basis in law or in fact and, therefore, will be dismissed as frivolous pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and § 1915(A)(b)(1).

B. Eleventh Amendment Immunity

Plaintiff’s claims against the VCC, the DOC, the Infirmary, and Delaware are barred by the State’s Eleventh Amendment immunity. *See MCI Telecom. Corp. v. Bell Atl. of Pa.*, 271 F.3d 491, 503 (3d Cir. 2001). The Eleventh Amendment of the United States Constitution protects an unconsenting state or state agency from a suit brought in federal court by one of its own citizens, regardless of the relief sought. *See Pennhurst State Sch. & Hosp. v. Halderman*, 465 U.S. 89 (1984); *Edelman v. Jordan*, 415 U.S. 651 (1974). Here, the State has not waived its

immunity from suit in federal court. Moreover, although Congress can abrogate a state's sovereign immunity, it did not do so through the enactment of 42 U.S.C. § 1983. *See Brooks-McCollum v. Delaware*, 213 F. App'x 92, 94 (3d Cir. Jan. 11, 2007) (not published). In addition, dismissal is proper because the foregoing Defendants are not persons for purposes of § 1983. *See Will v. Michigan Dep't of State Police*, 491 U.S. 58, 71 (1989); *Calhoun v. Young*, 288 F. App'x 47 (3d Cir. Aug. 1, 2008) (not published).

Therefore, the Court will dismiss the claims against the VCC, the DOC, the Infirmary, and Delaware, as each of them is immune from suit pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and § 1915A(b)(1).

C. Respondeat Superior

Plaintiff names Warden Phelps as a defendant, but the Complaint contains no allegations referencing him. Hence, it appears that Plaintiff names Phelps based solely upon his supervisory position.

“A defendant in a civil rights action must have personal involvement in the alleged wrongs to be liable, and cannot be held responsible for a constitutional violation which he or she neither participated in nor approved.” *Baraka v. McGreevey*, 481 F.3d 187, 210 (3d Cir. 2007). “Personal involvement can be shown through allegations of personal direction or of actual knowledge and acquiescence.” *Rode v. Dellarciprete*, 845 F.2d 1195, 1207 (3d Cir. 1988). The Third Circuit has reiterated that a § 1983 claim cannot be premised upon a theory of respondeat superior and that, in order to establish liability for deprivation of a constitutional right, a party must show personal involvement by each defendant. *See Brito v. United States Dep't of Justice*, 392 F. App'x 11, 14 (3d Cir. Aug. 18, 2010) (not published); *see also Rode*, 845 F.2d at 1207.

“Because vicarious liability is inapplicable to § 1983 suits, a plaintiff must plead that each Government-official defendant, through the official's own individual actions, has violated the Constitution.” *Iqbal*, 129 S.Ct. at 1948 (2009). In *Iqbal*, the Supreme Court emphasized that “[i]n a § 1983 suit – here masters do not answer for the torts of their servants – the term ‘supervisory liability’ is a misnomer. Absent vicarious liability, each Government official, his or her title notwithstanding, is only liable for his or her own misconduct.” *Iqbal*, 129 S.Ct. at 1949. “Thus, when a plaintiff sues an official under § 1983 for conduct ‘arising from his or her superintendent responsibilities,’ the plaintiff must plausibly plead and eventually prove not only that the official's subordinates violated the Constitution, but that the official by virtue of his own conduct and state of mind did so as well.” *Dodds v. Richardson*, 614 F.3d 1185, 1198 (11th Cir. 2010) (quoting *Iqbal*, 129 S.Ct. at 1949). The factors necessary to establish a § 1983 violation will vary with the constitutional provision at issue. *See id.*

Under pre-*Iqbal* Third Circuit precedent, “[t]here are two theories of supervisory liability,” one under which supervisors can be liable if they “established and maintained a policy, practice or custom which directly caused [the] constitutional harm,” and another under which they can be liable if they “participated in violating plaintiff’s rights, directed others to violate them, or, as the person[s] in charge, had knowledge of and acquiesced in [their] subordinates’ violations.” *Santiago v. Warminster Twp.*, 629 F.3d 121, 127 n.5 (3d Cir. 2010) (internal quotation marks omitted). “Particularly after *Iqbal*, the connection between the supervisor’s directions and the constitutional deprivation must be sufficient to demonstrate a plausible nexus or affirmative link between the directions and the specific deprivation of constitutional rights at issue.” *Id.* at 130.

The Third Circuit has recognized the potential effect that *Iqbal* might have in altering the standard for supervisory liability in a § 1983 suit but, to date, has declined to decide whether *Iqbal* requires narrowing of the scope of the test. See *Santiago*, 629 F.3d 130 n.8; *Bayer v. Monroe County Children and Youth Servs.*, 577 F.3d 186, 190 n.5 (3d Cir. 2009) (stating in light of *Iqbal*, it is uncertain whether proof of personal knowledge, with nothing more, provides sufficient basis to impose liability upon supervisory official). Hence, it appears that, under a supervisory theory of liability, and even in light of *Iqbal*, personal involvement by a defendant remains the touchstone for establishing liability for the violation of a plaintiff's constitutional right.³ *Williams v. Lackawanna County Prison*, 2010 WL 1491132, at *5 (M.D. Pa. Apr. 13, 2010).

Facts showing personal involvement of the defendant must be asserted; such assertions may be made through allegations of specific facts showing that a defendant expressly directed the deprivation of a plaintiff's constitutional rights or created such policies where the subordinates had no discretion in applying the policies in a fashion other than the one which actually produced the alleged deprivation; *e.g.*, supervisory liability may attach if the plaintiff asserts facts showing that the supervisor's actions were "the moving force" behind the harm suffered by the plaintiff. See *Sample*, 885 F.2d at 1117-18; see also *Iqbal*, 129 S.Ct. at 1949-54; *City of Canton v. Harris*,

³"Supervision entails, among other things, training, defining expected performance by promulgating rules or otherwise, monitoring adherence to performance standards, and responding to unacceptable performance whether through individualized discipline or further rulemaking." *Sample v. Diecks*, 885 F.2d 1099, 1116 (3d Cir. 1989). "For the purpose of defining the standard for liability of a supervisor under § 1983, the characterization of a particular aspect of supervision is unimportant." *Id.* at 1116-17.

489 U.S. 378 (1989); *Heggenmiller v. Edna Mahan Corr. Inst. for Women*, 128 F. App'x 240 (3d Cir. Apr. 11, 2005) (not published).

There are no allegations in the Complaint with regard to Warden Phelps. Indeed, Plaintiff provides no facts describing how Warden Phelps allegedly violated his constitutional rights, that Warden Phelps expressly directed the deprivation of his constitutional rights, or that he created policies which left subordinates with no discretion other than to apply them in a fashion which actually produced the alleged deprivation. Plaintiff has alleged no facts to support personal involvement by Warden Phelps. Accordingly, the Court will dismiss as frivolous all claims against Warden Phelps pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and § 1915A(b)(1).

D. Medical Provider

Finally, Plaintiff names FCM as a defendant. Similar to Warden Phelps, the Complaint contains no allegations directed towards FCM.⁴

When a plaintiff relies upon a theory of respondeat superior to hold a corporation liable, he must allege a policy or custom that demonstrates deliberate indifference. *See Sample v. Diecks*, 885 F.2d 1099, 1110 (3d Cir. 1989); *Miller v. Correctional Med. Sys., Inc.*, 802 F.Supp. 1126, 1132 (D. Del. 1992). In order to establish that FCM is directly liable for the alleged constitutional violations, Plaintiff “must provide evidence that there was a relevant [CMS] policy or custom, and that the policy caused the constitutional violation[s] [plaintiff] allege[s].” *Natale v. Camden County Corr. Facility*, 318 F.3d 575, 584 (3d Cir. 2003) (stating because respondeat superior or vicarious liability cannot be basis for liability under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, corporation

⁴The Court notes that FCM last served as the contract medical services provider for the DOC on June 30, 2005 and, therefore, claims against it are, more than likely, time-barred.

under contract with state cannot be held liable for acts of its employees and agents under these theories).

The Complaint does not set forth any alleged constitutional violations by FCM. Accordingly the Court will dismiss the claims against FCM as frivolous pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and § 1915A(b)(1).

V. CONCLUSION

For the above reasons, the Court will deny as moot the Requests for Subpoenas and will dismiss the Complaint as frivolous pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and § 1915A(b)(1).

Amendment of the Complaint would be futile.

An appropriate Order follows.