

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF DELAWARE

WILLIE LAWYER BYNES, III,)	
)	
Plaintiff,)	
)	
v.)	Civ. Action No. 11-842-GMS
)	
C/O OUTTEN,)	
)	
Defendant.)	

MEMORANDUM

The plaintiff, Willie Lawyer Bynes, III (“Bynes”), an inmate at the James T. Vaughn Correctional Center (“VCC”), Smyrna, Delaware, filed this lawsuit pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 alleging assault and illegal detention.¹ (D.I. 2.) He appears *pro se* and was granted permission to proceed *in forma pauperis* pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915. (D.I. 7.) He has filed an amended complaint and a motion for relief. (D.I. 20, 23.) The court proceeds to review and screen the complaint pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and § 1915A(b).

I. BACKGROUND

The defendant C/O Outten (“Outten”) punched Bynes in the chest on January 10, 2011, because he allegedly thought Bynes had said something about his mother. Bynes seeks the criminal conviction of Outten. (D.I. 2.) Following dismissal and reopening of the case, Bynes filed an amended complaint alleging that his sentence has expired and that he is being illegally detained in retaliation for filing the complaint against Outten. (D.I. 20.) The amended complaint is not directed toward any defendant. Finally, on March 19, 2012, Bynes filed a motion for relief

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. *See West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988).

which essentially outlines his claim of illegal detention. (D.I. 23.) Similar to the amended complaint, the motion is not directed toward any defendant.

II. 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 a 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. *Phillips v. County of Allegheny*, 515 F.3d 224, 229 (3d Cir. 2008); *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. 89, 93 (2007). Because Bynes 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 (citations 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, e.g., *Deutsch v. United States*, 67 F.3d 1080, 1091-92 (3d Cir. 1995) (holding frivolous a suit alleging that prison officials took an 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 12(b)(6) motions. *Tourscher v. McCullough*, 184 F.3d 236, 240 (3d Cir. 1999) (applying Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6) standard to dismissal for failure to state a claim under § 1915(e)(2)(B)). However, 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 Bynes 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*, 556 U.S. 662 (2009); *Bell Atl. 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.” *Id.* at 678. When determining whether dismissal is appropriate, the court conducts a two-part analysis. *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 Bynes has a “plausible claim for relief.”² *Id.* at 211. In other words, the complaint must do more than allege Bynes’

²A 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. *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678 (quoting *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 570). 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.*

entitlement to relief; rather it must “show” such an entitlement with its facts. *Id.* “[W]here the well-pleaded facts do not permit the court to infer more than a mere possibility of misconduct, the complaint has alleged - but it has not shown - that the pleader is entitled to relief.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678 (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2)).

III. DISCUSSION

A. Criminal Action

In the original complaint, Bynes appears to seek the institution of a criminal case against Outten for assault in the first degree under Delaware law. To the extent that Bynes seeks to impose criminal liability upon Outten pursuant to Delaware criminal statutes, he lacks standing to proceed. *See Allen v. Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts*, 270 F. App’x 149, 150 (3d Cir. 2008) (not published); *see United States v. Friedland*, 83 F.3d 1531, 1539 (3d Cir. 1996) (“[T]he United States Attorney is responsible for the prosecution of all criminal cases within his or her district.”). The decision of whether to prosecute, and what criminal charges to bring, generally rests with the prosecutor. *See United States v. Batchelder*, 442 U.S. 114, 124 (1979). Therefore, the criminal claim will be dismissed as frivolous pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and § 1915A(b)(1).

B. Retaliation and Illegal Detention

The amended complaint and motion for relief contain allegations of retaliation and illegal detention, but do not indicate against whom the claims are directed. 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

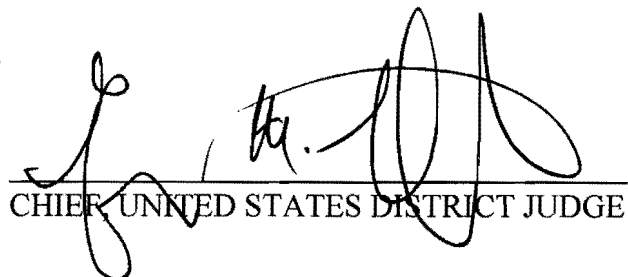
through allegations of personal direction or of actual knowledge and acquiescence.” *Rode v. Dellarciprete*, 845 F.2d 1195, 1207 (3d Cir. 1988). The Third Circuit has reiterated that a § 1983 claim cannot be premised upon a theory of respondeat superior and that, in order to establish liability for deprivation of a constitutional right, a party must show personal involvement by each defendant. *Brito v. United States Dep’t of Justice*, 392 F. App’x 11, 14 (3d Cir. 2010) (not published) (citing *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 676-677); *Rode v. Dellarciprete*, 845 F.2d at 1207). Inasmuch as the claims of retaliation and illegal detention are not directed towards any individual, they will be dismissed for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and § 1915A(b).

However, since it appears plausible that plaintiff may be able to articulate a claim against defendants (or name alternative defendants), he will be given an opportunity to amend his pleading. *See O’Dell v. United States Gov’t*, 256 F. App’x 444 (3d Cir. 2007) (not published) (leave to amend is proper where the plaintiff’s claims do not appear “patently meritless and beyond all hope of redemption”).

IV. CONCLUSION

For the above reasons, the complaint will be dismissed as frivolous and for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and § 1915A(b)(1). The court will deny Bynes’ motion for relief. Finally, Bynes will be given leave to file an amended complaint.

An appropriate order will be entered.


CHIEF, UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

May 4, 2012
Wilmington, Delaware