

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF DELAWARE

WARREN SMALL,)	
)	
Plaintiff,)	
)	
v.)	Civ. No.14-1281-SLR
)	
FIGLIOLA AND FACCIOLO, et al.,)	
)	
Defendants.)	

MEMORANDUM

1. **Introduction.** Plaintiff Warren Small (“plaintiff”), an inmate at the Howard R. Young Correctional Institution, proceeds pro se and has been granted leave to proceed in forma pauperis. He filed this complaint pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 claiming violations of his constitutional rights.¹ (D.I. 3)

2. **Standard of Review.** A federal court may properly dismiss an action sua sponte under the screening provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and § 1915A(b) if “the action is frivolous or malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief.” *Ball v. Famiglio*, 726 F.3d 448, 452 (3d Cir. 2013). See also 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

¹ When bringing a § 1983 claim, 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).

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 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 (citations omitted).

3. 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), 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).

4. 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. *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 §§ 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).

5. 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.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678. When determining whether dismissal is appropriate, the court must take three steps: “(1) identify[] the elements of the claim, (2) review[] the complaint to strike conclusory allegations, and then (3) look[] at the well-pleaded components of the complaint and evaluat[e] whether all of the elements identified in part one of the inquiry are sufficiently alleged.” *Malleus v. George*, 641 F.3d 560, 563 (3d Cir. 2011). Elements are sufficiently alleged when the facts in the complaint “show” that the plaintiff is entitled to relief. *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 679 (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2)). Deciding whether a claim is plausible will be a “context-specific task that requires the reviewing court to draw on its judicial experience and common sense.” *Id.*

6. **Discussion.** Plaintiff was represented by defendants during a criminal matter. He complains that defendants failed to use ordinary legal skills when representing him. Plaintiff seeks compensatory damages and his release from prison.

7. **State Actors.** As private attorneys, defendants are not state actors for purposes of § 1983. See *Polk County v. Dodson*, 454 U.S. 312, 325 (1981) (holding that public defenders do not act under color of state law); *Steward v. Meeker*, 459 F.2d 669 (3d Cir. 1972) (privately-retained counsel does not act under color of state law when representing client); *Thomas v. Howard*, 455 F.2d 228 (3d Cir. 1972) (court-appointed pool attorney does not act under color of state law). In addition, there are no allegations in the complaint that give rise to a plausible inference that defendants, as private attorneys, acted under color of state law or conspired with state actors to deny plaintiff

his constitutional rights. Accordingly, plaintiff cannot recover under § 1983. See *Great Western Mining & Mineral Co. v. Fox Rothschild LLP*, 615 F.3d 159, 175-76 (3d Cir. 2010) (holding that “[t]o prevail on a § 1983 claim, a plaintiff must allege that the defendant acted under color of state law, in other words, that there was state action.”); see also *Reichley v. Pa. Dep’t of Agric.*, 427 F.3d 236, 245 (3d Cir. 2005).

8. The claims against defendants fail as a matter of law. Inasmuch as the claims have no arguable basis in law or in fact, they will be dismissed as frivolous pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i) and § 1915(A)(b)(1).

9. **Conclusion.** For the above reasons, the complaint will be dismissed as frivolous pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i) and § 1915A(b)(1). The court finds amendment futile. A separate order shall issue.


UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

Date: January 16, 2015