

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY

JACOB THOMAS THATCH, JR.,

Plaintiff,

v.

CAMDEN COUNTY CORRECTIONAL
FACILITY,

Defendant.

HONORABLE JEROME B. SIMANDLE

Civil Action

No. 16-cv-05888 (JBS-AMD)

OPINION

APPEARANCES:

Jacob T. Thatch, Jr., Plaintiff Pro Se
1123 Princess Ave.
Camden, NJ 08103

SIMANDLE, Chief District Judge:

1. Plaintiff Jacob T. Thatch, Jr., seeks to bring an amended civil rights complaint pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against the Camden County Correctional Facility ("CCCF"). Amended Complaint, Docket Entry 5. On November 23, 2016, Plaintiff's original complaint was dismissed without prejudice for failure to state a claim pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(b)(ii). Docket Entry 4.

2. Section 1915(e)(2) requires a court to review complaints prior to service in cases in which a plaintiff is proceeding *in forma pauperis*. The Court must *sua sponte* dismiss any claim that is frivolous, is 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. This action is subject to *sua sponte* screening for dismissal under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) because Plaintiff is proceeding *in forma pauperis*.

3. For the reasons set forth below, and for substantially similar reasons as those set forth in this Court's prior Opinion (Docket Entry 3), the Court will dismiss the amended complaint without prejudice for failure to state a claim. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(b)(ii).

4. To survive *sua sponte* screening for failure to state a claim, the complaint must allege "sufficient factual matter" to show that the claim is facially plausible. *Fowler v. UPMS Shadyside*, 578 F.3d 203, 210 (3d Cir. 2009) (citation omitted). "A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged." *Fair Wind Sailing, Inc. v. Dempster*, 764 F.3d 303, 308 n.3 (3d Cir. 2014). "[A] pleading that offers 'labels or conclusions' or 'a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action will not do.'" *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (quoting *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007)).

5. Plaintiff brings this action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983¹ for alleged violations of Plaintiff's constitutional rights. In order to set forth a *prima facie* case under § 1983, a plaintiff must show: "(1) a person deprived him of a federal right; and (2) the person who deprived him of that right acted under color of state or territorial law." *Groman v. Twp. of Manalapan*, 47 F.3d 628, 633 (3d Cir. 1995) (citing *Gomez v. Toledo*, 446 U.S. 635, 640 (1980)).

6. Generally, for purposes of actions under § 1983, "[t]he term 'persons' includes local and state officers acting under color of state law." *Carver v. Foerster*, 102 F.3d 96, 99 (3d Cir. 1996) (citing *Hafer v. Melo*, 502 U.S. 21 (1991)).² To say that a person was "acting under color of state law" means that the defendant in a § 1983 action "exercised power [that the defendant] possessed by virtue of state law and made possible only because the wrongdoer [was] clothed with the authority of

¹ Section 1983 provides: "Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State . . . subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress" 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

² "Person" is not strictly limited to individuals who are state and local government employees, however. For example, municipalities and other local government units, such as counties, also are considered "persons" for purposes of § 1983. See *Monell v. N.Y.C. Dep't of Social Services*, 436 U.S. 658, 690-91 (1978).

state law." *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 49 (1988) (citation omitted). Generally, then, "a public employee acts under color of state law while acting in his official capacity or while exercising his responsibilities pursuant to state law." *Id.* at 50.

7. Because Plaintiff has not sufficiently alleged that a "person" deprived him of a federal right, the amended complaint does not meet the standards necessary to set forth a *prima facie* case under § 1983. In the amended complaint, Plaintiff seeks monetary damages from CCCF for allegedly unconstitutional conditions of confinement. The CCCF, however, is not a "person" within the meaning of § 1983; therefore, the claims against it must be dismissed with prejudice. *See Crawford v. McMillian*, 660 F. App'x 113, 116 (3d Cir. 2016) ("[T]he prison is not an entity subject to suit under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.") (citing *Fischer v. Cahill*, 474 F.2d 991, 992 (3d Cir. 1973)). Because the claims against the CCCF must be dismissed with prejudice, the claims may not proceed and Plaintiff may not name the CCCF as a defendant.

8. Plaintiff may be able to amend the complaint to name a person or persons who were personally involved in the alleged unconstitutional conditions of confinement, however. To that end, the Court shall grant Plaintiff leave to amend the

complaint one final time within 30 days of the date of this order.

9. Plaintiff is again advised that the amended complaint must plead sufficient facts to support a reasonable inference that a constitutional violation has occurred in order to survive this Court's review under § 1915. Plaintiff alleges that he was incarcerated in 2000, 2001, 2012, 2014, and 2016. Am. Complaint § III. Plaintiff states: "I was in a cell with 3 other inmates the living conditions were unhumane [sic] overcrowded I was sleeping under the table, I was sleeping on the floor under a bunk. Even in intake cell 36 & 38 I was sleeping on the floor with trash all over the floor I have a deformed left arm & was still on the floor. OVERCROWDED in 2001 I was in CCCF for 8 months then I went to Riverfront State Prison I've been in & out for shoplifting & drug charges." *Id.* Though these allegations offer slightly greater detail than those found in Plaintiff's original complaint, even accepting these amended statements as true for screening purposes only, there is still not enough factual support for the Court to infer a constitutional violation has occurred.

10. As the Court previously explained, the mere fact that an individual is lodged temporarily in a cell with more persons than its intended design does not rise to the level of a constitutional violation. *See Rhodes v. Chapman*, 452 U.S. 337,

348-50 (1981) (holding double-celling by itself did not violate Eighth Amendment); *Carson v. Mulvihill*, 488 F. App'x 554, 560 (3d Cir. 2012) ("[M]ere double-bunking does not constitute punishment, because there is no 'one man, one cell principle lurking in the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment.'" (quoting *Bell v. Wolfish*, 441 U.S. 520, 542 (1979))). More is needed to demonstrate that such crowded conditions, for a pretrial detainee, shocks the conscience and thus violates due process rights. See *Hubbard v. Taylor*, 538 F.3d 229, 233 (3d Cir. 2008) (noting due process analysis requires courts to consider whether the totality of the conditions "cause[s] inmates to endure such genuine privations and hardship over an extended period of time, that the adverse conditions become excessive in relation to the purposes assigned to them."). Some relevant factors are the dates and length of the confinement(s), whether Plaintiff was a pretrial detainee or convicted prisoner, etc.

11. As Plaintiff may yet be able to amend his complaint to address the deficiencies noted by the Court,³ the Court once more

³ To the extent the complaint seeks relief for conditions Plaintiff encountered during confinements ending prior to September 26, 2014, those claims are barred by the statute of limitations. Claims brought under § 1983 are governed by New Jersey's two-year limitations period for personal injury. See *Wilson v. Garcia*, 471 U.S. 261, 276 (1985); *Dique v. N.J. State Police*, 603 F.3d 181, 185 (3d Cir. 2010). "Under federal law, a cause of action accrues when the plaintiff knew or should have

shall grant Plaintiff leave to amend the complaint within 30 days of the date of this order. However, this shall be Plaintiff's final opportunity to amend the complaint for screening purposes. If Plaintiff elects to amend a second time and the second amended complaint is insufficient to survive the Court's review under § 1915, the complaint will be dismissed with prejudice, meaning that Plaintiff will not be granted leave to amend a third time.

12. Plaintiff is reminded that when an amended complaint is filed, any previous complaints no longer perform any function in the case and cannot be utilized to cure defects in the amended complaint, unless the relevant portion is specifically incorporated in the new complaint. 6 Wright, Miller & Kane, Federal Practice and Procedure 1476 (2d ed. 1990) (footnotes omitted). An amended complaint may adopt some or all of the allegations in the prior complaint, but the identification of

known of the injury upon which the action is based." *Montanez v. Sec'y Pa. Dep't of Corr.*, 773 F.3d 472, 480 (3d Cir. 2014). Plaintiff has alleged that he encountered unconstitutional conditions of confinement in 2000, 2001, 2012, 2014, and 2016. Complaint § III. The allegedly unconstitutional conditions of confinement at CCCF would have been immediately apparent to Plaintiff at the time of his detention; therefore, the statute of limitations for some of Plaintiff's claims expired in 2002, 2003, 2014, and sometime in 2016. In the event Plaintiff elects to file a second amended complaint, he should focus on facts regarding his 2016 confinement and his 2014 confinement if he was in confinement on or subsequent to September 26, 2014, even if such confinement began before that date.

the particular allegations to be adopted must be clear and explicit. *Id.* To avoid confusion, the safer course is to file an amended complaint that is complete in itself.⁴ *Id.*

13. For the reasons stated above, the amended complaint is dismissed without prejudice for failure to state a claim. The Court will reopen the matter in the event Plaintiff files a second amended complaint within the time allotted by the Court.

14. An appropriate order follows.

March 13, 2017
Date

s/ Jerome B. Simandle
JEROME B. SIMANDLE
Chief U.S. District Judge

⁴ The second amended complaint shall be subject to screening prior to service.