

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY

GORDON COLEMAN,

Plaintiff,

v.

WARDEN JAMES OWENS; DEPUTY
WARDEN C. JOHNSON; CAMDEN COUNTY
BOARD OF FREEHOLDERS; CHIEF J.
THOMPSON,

Defendants.

HONORABLE JEROME B. SIMANDLE

Civil Action

No. 16-cv-06023 (JBS-AMD)

OPINION

APPEARANCES:

Gordon Coleman, Plaintiff Pro Se
1339 Thurman St.
Camden, NJ 08104

SIMANDLE, Chief District Judge:

1. Plaintiff Gordon Coleman seeks to bring a civil rights complaint pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against the Camden County Freeholders ("Freeholders"), Warden James Owens, Deputy Warden C. Johnson, and Metro Police Chief Thompson for allegedly unconstitutional conditions of confinement in Camden County Correctional Facility ("CCCF"). Complaint, Docket Entry 1.

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, the Court will dismiss the 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) (quoting *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678). "[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 alleges he experienced unconstitutional conditions of confinement during his detention at the CCCF. Complaint § III. He states: "I was placed in a cell with 4 inmates in each room on numerous occasion when place in the [CCCF]. Sleeping on the floors due to overcrowding numerous

times I went to the [CCCF]." *Id.* § III. Even accepting the statement as true for screening purposes only, there is not enough factual support for the Court to infer a constitutional violation has occurred.

6. 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 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 her confinement(s), whether he was a pretrial detainee or convicted prisoner, etc.

7. Moreover, Plaintiff has not pled sufficient facts regarding the personal liability of the Freeholders. As the governing body of Camden County, the Freeholders cannot be held liable under § 1983 solely on a theory of respondeat superior. *Monell v. N.Y.C. Dep't of Social Services*, 436 U.S. 658, 690-91 (1978). Plaintiff must instead plead facts showing that the Freeholders are "responsible for either the affirmative proclamation of a policy or acquiescence in a well-settled custom." *Bielewicz v. Dubinon*, 915 F.2d 845, 850 (3d Cir. 1990).¹ In other words, Plaintiff must set forth facts supporting an inference that the Freeholders were the "moving force" behind the alleged constitutional violation. *Monell*, 436 U.S. at 689.

8. Likewise, Plaintiff has not pled sufficient facts to support an inference that Warden Owens, Deputy Warden Johnson, and Chief Thompson were each personally involved in either the creation of, or failure to address, the conditions of his confinement. State actors are liable only for their own unconstitutional conduct and may not be held liable for the

¹ "Policy is made when a decisionmaker possess[ing] final authority to establish municipal policy with respect to the action issues an official proclamation, policy, or edict. Government custom can be demonstrated by showing that a given course of conduct, although not specifically endorsed or authorized by law, is so well-settled and permanent as virtually to constitute law." *Kirkland v. DiLeo*, 581 F. App'x 111, 118 (3d Cir. 2014) (internal quotation marks and citations omitted) (alteration in original).

unconstitutional conduct of their subordinates under a theory of respondeat superior. *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 676 (2009); *Bistrrian v. Levi*, 696 F.3d 352, 366 (3d Cir. 2012).

9. Plaintiff further alleges he was denied medical care after he injured his head. Complaint § IV. In order to set forth a cognizable claim for a violation of the right to adequate medical care, an inmate must allege: (1) a serious medical need; and (2) behavior on the part of prison officials that constitutes deliberate indifference to that need. See *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 106 (1976); *Natale v. Camden Cnty. Corr. Facility*, 318 F.3d 575, 582 (3d Cir. 2003). Plaintiff states he was only given Advil after he hit his head on a table; however "[w]here a prisoner has received some medical attention and the dispute is over the adequacy of the treatment, federal courts are generally reluctant to second guess medical judgments and to constitutionalize claims which sound in . . . tort law.'" *DeJesus v. Corr. Med. Servs., Inc.*, 574 F. App'x 66, 68-69 (3d Cir. 2014) (quoting *United States ex rel. Walker v. Fayette Cnty.*, 599 F.2d 573, 575 n. 2 (3d Cir. 1979)) (alteration in original). Plaintiff therefore has not stated a claim for denial of adequate medical care.

10. Plaintiff may be able to amend his complaint to address the deficiencies noted by the Court, however. To that

end, the Court shall grant Plaintiff leave to amend the complaint within 30 days of the date of this order.

11. Plaintiff should note that when an amended complaint is filed,² the original complaint no longer performs 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 original complaint,³ but the identification of 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. *Id.*

² The amended complaint shall be subject to screening prior to service.

³ To the extent the complaint seeks relief for conditions Plaintiff encountered on May 27, 2012 and May 10, 2010, 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 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). The allegedly unconstitutional conditions of confinement would have been immediately apparent to Plaintiff; therefore, the statute of limitations on some of Plaintiff's claims expired in May 2014 at the latest. In the event Plaintiff elects to file an amended complaint, he should limit his complaint to his October 15, 2014 and July 17, 2016 confinements.

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

13. An appropriate order follows.

November 18, 2016
Date

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