

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY

JOSEPH BAILEY,

Plaintiff,

v.

WARDEN DAVID OWENS; CAMDEN
COUNTY CORRECTIONAL FACILITY,

Defendants.

HONORABLE JEROME B. SIMANDLE

Civil Action
No. 16-cv-08779 (JBS-AMD)

OPINION

APPEARANCES:

Joseph Bailey, Plaintiff Pro Se
3 West Industrial Blvd.
Bridgeton, NJ 08302

SIMANDLE, District Judge:

I. INTRODUCTION

Plaintiff Joseph Bailey seeks to bring a civil rights complaint pursuant to the 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against Warden David Owens ("Warden") and Camden County Correctional Facility ("CCCCF") for allegedly unconstitutional conditions of confinement. Complaint, Docket Entry 1. At this time, the Court must review the complaint to determine whether it should be dismissed as frivolous or malicious, for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or because it seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. For the reasons set forth below, the Court concludes that the complaint will proceed in part.

II. BACKGROUND

The following factual allegations are taken from the complaint and are accepted for purposes of this screening only. The Court has made no findings as to the truth of Plaintiff's allegations.

Plaintiff alleges he was incarcerated from January to December 2014 and during this time, slept in an overcrowded cell with three other inmates. Complaint ¶ 6. Plaintiff states they constantly had to step over him to use the toilet, the floors were dirty and cleaning supplies were not provided, his sheets were not changed regularly, the food was cold and they often had to stand to eat. *Id.* He further states he sustained rashes due to the showers which had 100 inmates using 2-3 showers. *Id.* He states the overcrowdedness [sic] led to many fights.

He further states he law library privileges were limited due to too many people on the library list. *Id.* He also states his visits were cancelled repeatedly due to visitors exceeding the maximum limit. *Id.*

Plaintiff seeks to be compensated for the conditions he sustained in the CCCF. Complaint ¶ 7.

III. STANDARD OF REVIEW

A. Standards for a Sua Sponte Dismissal

Per the Prison Litigation Reform Act, Pub. L. No. 104-134, §§ 801-810, 110 Stat. 1321-66 to 1321-77 (April 26, 1996)

("PLRA"), district courts must review complaints in those civil actions in which a prisoner is proceeding *in forma pauperis*, see 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B), seeks redress against a governmental employee or entity, see 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b), or brings a claim with respect to prison conditions, see 42 U.S.C. § 1997e. The PLRA directs district courts to *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, 1915A and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e because Plaintiff is a prisoner proceeding in forma pauperis and is seeking redress from government officials about the conditions of his confinement.

According to the Supreme Court's decision in *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, "a pleading that offers 'labels or conclusions' or 'a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action will not do.'" 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (quoting *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007)). 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). Moreover, while pro se pleadings are liberally construed, they "still must allege sufficient facts in their complaints to support a claim." *Mala v. Crown Bay Marina, Inc.*, 704 F.3d 239, 245 (3d Cir. 2013) (citation omitted).

B. Section 1983 Actions

A plaintiff may have a cause of action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 for certain violations of his constitutional rights.

Section 1983 provides in relevant part:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory ... 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

28 U.S.C. § 1983. Thus, to state a claim for relief under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege, first, the violation of a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States and, second, that the alleged deprivation was committed or caused by a person acting under color of state law. See *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); *Malleus v. George*, 641 F.3d 560, 563 (3d

Cir. 2011); *Piecknick v. Pennsylvania*, 36 F.3d 1250, 1255-56 (3d Cir. 1994).

IV. DISCUSSION

Plaintiff alleges he experienced unconstitutional conditions of confinement during his detention at CCCF, and the complaint could also be construed as raising a First Amendment access to the courts claim.

A. Conditions of Pretrial Confinement

Plaintiff alleges he experienced constitutional conditions of confinement at CCCF due to overcrowding. "[U]nder the Due Process Clause, a detainee may not be punished prior to an adjudication of guilt in accordance with due process of law." *Bell v. Wolfish*, 441 U.S. 520, 535 (1979). 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 *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*, 441 U.S. at 542). Overcrowding leading to conditions that "cause inmates to endure such genuine privations and hardship over an extended period of time" and that "become excessive in relation to the purposes assigned to them" does constitute unconstitutional punishment, however.

Hubbard v. Taylor, 538 F.3d 229, 233 (3d Cir. 2008) (internal citations and quotation marks omitted).

The claims against CCCF must be dismissed with prejudice because it is not a "state actor" within the meaning of § 1983. 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)); *Grabow v. Southern State Corr. Facility*, 726 F. Supp. 537, 538-39 (D.N.J. 1989) (correctional facility is not a "person" under § 1983). Construing the complaint liberally and giving Plaintiff the benefit of all reasonable inferences, he has sufficiently stated a claim for unconstitutional conditions of confinement against Warden David Owens. Specifically, he alleges that the overcrowded conditions led to unsanitary conditions in the cells and showers as well as inadequate library and visitation time. Considering the totality of the circumstances alleged by Plaintiff, the Court finds that he has sufficiently pled that he experienced unconstitutionally punitive conditions at CCCF. The claim shall therefore be permitted to proceed against the wardens in their individual capacities.

B. Access to the Courts

The complaint could also be reasonably construed as attempting to raise a First Amendment denial of access to the

courts claim. Plaintiff alleges that he was denied access to the law library.

"To establish a cognizable [access to the courts] claim, a prisoner must demonstrate that he has suffered an actual injury to his ability to present a claim." *Henry v. Moore*, 500 F. App'x 115, 117 (3d Cir. 2012) (citing *Christopher v. Harbury*, 536 U.S. 403, 415 (2002)). Additionally, "the claim must relate to either a direct or collateral challenge to the prisoner's sentence or conditions of confinement [and] a prisoner must demonstrate that no other remedy will potentially compensate for the lost claim." *Id.* (internal citations omitted).

Plaintiff alleges that he was denied access to the law library due to too many individuals waiting for the library. Complaint ¶ 6. This is insufficient to allege an access to the courts claim as Plaintiff has not identified a non-frivolous claim he has lost or alleged that the policies impacted his criminal case. See *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 351 (1996) ("[A]n inmate cannot establish relevant actual injury simply by establishing that his prison's law library or legal assistance program is subpar in some theoretical sense."). This is claim is dismissed without prejudice, and Plaintiff may amend this claim

if he is able to allege facts that address the deficiencies noted by the Court.¹

V. CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated above, the complaint shall proceed on the due process claims against Warden Owens. The remainder of the claims are dismissed without prejudice. An appropriate order follows.

October 19, 2017

Date

s/ Jerome B. Simandle

JEROME B. SIMANDLE

U.S. District Judge

¹ In the event Plaintiff elects to move to amend his complaint under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 15, he should note that once an amended complaint is filed, 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, 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.*