

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

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STEPHEN KIRK ROMANELLO, JR.,

Plaintiff,

-against-

MEMORANDUM & ORDER
14-CV-5607 (JS) (ARL)

SUFFOLK COUNTY CORRECTIONAL
FACILITY,

Defendant.

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APPEARANCES

For Plaintiff: Stephen Kirk Romanello, Jr., pro se
395751
Suffolk County Correctional Facility
110 Center Drive
Riverhead, NY 11901

For Defendant: No appearance.

SEYBERT, District Judge:

On September 22, 2014, incarcerated pro se plaintiff Stephen Kirk Romanello ("Plaintiff") filed a Complaint in this Court pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 ("Section 1983") against the Suffolk County Correctional Facility ("the Jail" or "Defendant"), accompanied by an application to proceed in forma pauperis.

Upon review of the declaration in support of the application to proceed in forma pauperis, the Court finds that Plaintiff is qualified to commence this action without prepayment of the filing fee. See 28 U.S.C. §§ 1914(a); 1915(a)(1). Therefore, Plaintiff's request to proceed in forma pauperis is GRANTED. However, for the reasons that follow, the Complaint is sua sponte DISMISSED WITH PREJUDICE as against the Jail and WITH LEAVE TO FILE AN AMENDED COMPLAINT as set forth herein pursuant to

28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii), 1915A(b)(1).

BACKGROUND¹

Plaintiff's brief, handwritten Complaint, submitted on the Court's Section 1983 Complaint form, alleges in its entirety:

On June 26, 2014 while I was incarcerated in Suffolk County Correctional Facility located at 110 Center [D]rive in Riverhead, NY 11901 I was assaulted [by] an officer on the above date at that location on the 3rd floor in the pods yoused [sic] abusive force.

(Compl. ¶ IV.)

As a result of the foregoing, Plaintiff claims to have sustained "injury to my left wrist when my hands were cuffed behind my back. There are lacerations that left scars" Plaintiff also alleges that he suffered "nerve damages[,] most likely from a pinched nerve that has made my left thumb and index finger numb, and the lower part of my hand and wrist with shooting pains."

(Compl. ¶ IV.A.) Plaintiff does not allege any particular form of relief. Rather, seeks unspecified relief for "pain and suffering, medical expenses, [and] negligence by medical staff and officers."

(Compl. ¶ V.)

DISCUSSION

I. In Forma Pauperis Application

Upon review of Plaintiff's declaration in support of the

¹ The following facts are taken from Plaintiff's Complaint and are presumed to be true for the purpose of this Memorandum and Order.

application to proceed in forma pauperis, the Court finds that Plaintiff is qualified to commence this action without prepayment of the filing fees. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(1). Therefore, Plaintiff's request to proceed in forma pauperis is GRANTED.

II. Application of 28 U.S.C. § 1915

Section 1915 of Title 28 requires a district court to dismiss an in forma pauperis complaint if the action is frivolous or malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief. See 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(i)-(iii), 1915A(b). The Court is required to dismiss the action as soon as it makes such a determination. See id. § 1915A(b).

Courts are obliged to construe the pleadings of a pro se plaintiff liberally. See Sealed Plaintiff v. Sealed Defendant, 537 F.3d 185, 191 (2d Cir. 2008); McEachin v. McGuinnis, 357 F.3d 197, 200 (2d Cir. 2004). However, a complaint must plead sufficient facts to "state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face." Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 570, 127 S. Ct. 1955, 1974, 167 L. Ed. 2d 929 (2007). "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." Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678, 129 S. Ct. 1937, 173 L. Ed. 2d 868 (2009) (citations omitted). The plausibility standard requires "more than a sheer possibility that

a defendant has acted unlawfully.” Id. at 678; accord Wilson v. Merrill Lynch & Co., Inc., 671 F.3d 120, 128 (2d Cir. 2011). While “‘detailed factual allegations’” are not required, “[a] pleading that offers ‘labels and conclusions’ or ‘a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action will not do.’” Iqbal, 556 U.S. at 678 (quoting Twombly, 550 U.S. at 555).

III. Section 1983

Section 1983 provides that

[e]very 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 . . . to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured

42 U.S.C. § 1983; accord Rehberg v. Paulk, --- U.S. ----, 132 S. Ct. 1497, 1501-02, 182 L. Ed. 2d 593 (2012). To state a claim under Section 1983, a plaintiff must “‘allege that (1) the challenged conduct was attributable at least in part to a person who was acting under color of state law and (2) the conduct deprived the plaintiff of a right guaranteed under the Constitution of the United States.’” Rae v. Cnty. of Suffolk, 693 F. Supp. 2d 217, 223 (E.D.N.Y. 2010) (quoting Snider v. Dylag, 188 F.3d 51, 53 (2d Cir. 1999)).

A. Claims Against the Jail

It is well-established that “under New York law, departments that are merely administrative arms of a municipality

do not have a legal identity separate and apart from the municipality and, therefore, cannot sue or be sued.” Davis v. Lynbrook Police Dep’t, 224 F. Supp. 2d 463, 477 (E.D.N.Y. 2002); see also Hawkins v. Nassau Cnty. Corr. Fac., 781 F. Supp. 2d 107, 109 at n. 1 (E.D.N.Y. 2011) (dismissing claims against Nassau County Jail because it is an “administrative arm[] . . . of the County of Nassau, and thus lacks the capacity to be sued as a separate entity” (internal quotation marks and citations omitted) (alteration in original)); Trahan v. Suffolk Cnty. Corr. Fac., 12-CV-4353, 2012 WL 5904730, *3 (E.D.N.Y. Nov. 26, 2012) (dismissing claims against the Suffolk County Jail because it “is an administrative arm of Suffolk County, without an independent legal identity.”). Thus, Plaintiff’s claims against the Jail are not plausible because the Jail has no legal identity separate and apart from Suffolk County. See McKoy v. Suffolk Cnty. Corr., 14-CV-0249, 2014 WL 824516, *2 (E.D.N.Y. Mar. 3, 2014). Accordingly, Plaintiff’s claims against the Jail are DISMISSED WITH PREJUDICE.

B. Claims Against Suffolk County

Given Plaintiff’s pro se status and affording his Complaint a liberal construction, the Court next considers whether he has alleged a plausible Section 1983 claim against the municipality, Suffolk County. It is well-established that a municipality such as Suffolk County cannot be held liable under § 1983 on a respondeat superior theory. See Monell v. Dep’t of

Soc. Servs. of N.Y.C., 436 U.S. 658, 691, 98 S. Ct. 2018, 2036, 56 L. Ed. 2d 611 (1978); Roe v. City of Waterbury, 542 F.3d 31, 36 (2d Cir. 2008).

To prevail on a Section 1983 claim against a municipality, a plaintiff must show "that 'action pursuant to official municipal policy' caused the alleged constitutional injury." Cash v. Cnty. of Erie, 654 F.3d 324, 333 (2d Cir. 2011) (quoting Connick v. Thompson, 131 S. Ct. 1350, 1359, 179 L. Ed. 2d 417 (2011)); see also Monell, 436 U.S. at 690-91. "[L]ocal governments . . . may be sued for constitutional deprivations visited pursuant to governmental 'custom' even though such a custom has not received formal approval through the body's official decisionmaking channels." Monell, 436 U.S. at 690-691 (internal citation omitted).

To establish the existence of a municipal policy or custom, the plaintiff must allege: (1) the existence of a formal policy which is officially endorsed by the municipality, see Connick, 131 S. Ct. at 1359; (2) actions taken or decisions made by municipal policymaking officials, i.e., officials with final decisionmaking authority, which caused the alleged violation of the plaintiff's civil rights, see Amnesty Am. v. Town of W. Hartford, 361 F.3d 113, 126 (2d Cir. 2004); Jeffes v. Barnes, 208 F.3d 49, 57 (2d Cir. 2000), cert. denied, Cnty. of Schenectady v. Jeffes, 531 U.S. 813, 121 S. Ct. 47, 148 L. Ed. 2d 16 (2000); (3) a practice

"so persistent and widespread as to practically have the force of law," Connick, 131 S. Ct. at 1359; see also Green v. City of N.Y., 465 F.3d 65, 80 (2d Cir. 2006), or that "was so manifest as to imply the constructive acquiescence of senior policy-making officials," Patterson v. Cnty. of Oneida, N.Y., 375 F.3d 206, 226 (2d Cir. 2004) (internal quotation marks and citations omitted); or (4) that "a policymaking official exhibit[ed] deliberate indifference to constitutional deprivations caused by subordinates." Cash, 654 F.3d at 334 (internal quotation marks and citations omitted); see also Okin v. Vill. of Cornwall-on-Hudson Police Dep't, 577 F.3d 415, 439 (2d Cir. 2009) (A municipal custom may be found when "'faced with a pattern of misconduct, [the municipality] does nothing, compelling the conclusion that [it] has acquiesced in or tacitly authorized its subordinates' unlawful actions.'" (quoting Reynolds v. Giuliani, 506 F.3d 183, 192 (2d Cir. 2007) (second alteration in original))).

Here, even affording the pro se Complaint a liberal construction, there are no factual allegations from which the Court could reasonably construe a plausible Section 1983 cause of action against Suffolk County. Accordingly, Plaintiff's Section 1983 claims, to the extent they are construed as against Suffolk County, are DISMISSED WITHOUT PREJUDICE. However, because a district court should not dismiss a pro se complaint without granting leave to amend at least once "when a liberal reading of the complaint

gives any indication that a valid claim might be stated," Chavis v. Chappius, 618 F.3d 162, 170 (2d Cir. 2010), **Plaintiff is GRANTED LEAVE TO AMEND his Complaint in accordance with this Order. Any Amended Complaint shall be filed within thirty (30) days from the date of this Order, shall be titled "Amended Complaint," and shall bear the same docket number as this Order, No. 14-CV-5607(JS) (ARL).** Plaintiff is cautioned that an Amended Complaint supercedes the original Complaint. Therefore, all claims and allegations Plaintiff wishes to pursue should be included in the Amended Complaint.

CONCLUSION

For the reasons set forth above, Plaintiff's application to proceed in forma pauperis is GRANTED, however the Complaint is sua sponte DISMISSED WITH PREJUDICE as against the Jail pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e) (2) (B) (ii), 1915A(b) (1). **Plaintiff is GRANTED LEAVE TO AMEND his Complaint in accordance with this Order. Any Amended Complaint shall be filed within thirty (30) days from the date of this Order, shall be titled "Amended Complaint," and shall bear the same docket number as this Order, No. 14-CV-5607(JS) (ARL).**

The Court certifies pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a) (3) that any appeal from this Order would not be taken in good faith and therefore in forma pauperis status is DENIED for the purpose of any appeal. See Coppedge v. United States, 369 U.S. 438, 444-45, 82 S. Ct. 917, 8 L. Ed. 2d 21 (1962).

The Clerk of the Court is further directed to mail a copy of this Memorandum and Order to the pro se Plaintiff.

SO ORDERED.

/s/ JOANNA SEYBERT
Joanna Seybert, U.S.D.J.

Dated: December 3, 2014
Central Islip, New York