

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

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JAHNI ROBINSON,

Plaintiff,

-against-

MEMORANDUM AND ORDER
19-CV-1535 (JS) (GRB)

NASSAU COUNTY JAIL,

Defendant.

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APPEARANCES

For Plaintiff: Jahni Robinson, pro se
18-A-1950
Cape Vincent Correctional Facility
Route 12E
P.O. Box 739
Cape Vincent, New York 13618

For Defendant: No appearance.

SEYBERT, District Judge:

On March 18, 2019, incarcerated pro se plaintiff Jahni Robinson ("Plaintiff") filed a Complaint in this Court pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 ("Section 1983") against the Nassau County Jail (the "Jail" or "Defendant"). (See Compl., D.E. 1.) Plaintiff filed an application to proceed in forma pauperis with the Complaint, (see IFP Mot., D.E. 2), but did not include the required Prisoner Litigation Authorization form ("PLRA"). Accordingly, by Notice of Deficiency dated March 20, 2019, Plaintiff was instructed to complete and return the enclosed PLRA within fourteen (14) days. (See D.E. 4.) On March 29, 2019, Plaintiff timely filed the PLRA. (See D.E. 6.) 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. § 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 pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii), 1915A(b).

BACKGROUND¹

Plaintiff's brief handwritten Complaint is submitted on the Court's Section 1983 complaint form. Plaintiff complains that, on January 3, 2017, "correctional officers allowed inmates to jump me and didn't break it up until it was over." (Compl. ¶ II.D.) As a result, Plaintiff alleges that he suffered a broken jaw "which required a mechanical wire and a permanent metal plate [i]n my chin." (Compl. ¶ IV.) As a result, Plaintiff claims that Defendant failed to protect him in violation of his Constitutional rights and seeks to recover a monetary award in the sum of \$15 million. (Compl. ¶ V.)

DISCUSSION

I. In Forma Pauperis Application

Upon review of Plaintiff's declaration in support of the

¹ All material allegations in the Complaint are presumed to be true for the purpose of this Order, see, e.g., Rogers v. City of Troy, New York, 148 F.3d 52, 58 (2d Cir. 1998) (in reviewing a pro se complaint for sua sponte dismissal, a court is required to accept the material allegations in the complaint as true).

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, 1949, 173 L. Ed. 2d 868 (2009) (citation 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., 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. 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 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. Cty. of Suffolk, No. 07-CV-2138, 2010 WL 768720, at *4 (E.D.N.Y. Mar. 5, 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 Cty. 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). Thus, Plaintiff’s Section 1983 claims against the Jail are not plausible and are DISMISSED WITH PREJUDICE pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(b)(ii); 1915A(b).

Given Plaintiff’s pro se status and affording his Complaint a liberal construction, the Court has considered whether Plaintiff has alleged a plausible Section 1983 claim against the municipality, Nassau County, and for the reasons that follow, finds that he has not.

1. Claims as Construed against Nassau County

It is well-established that a municipality such as Nassau 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. Cty. of Erie,

654 F.3d 324, 333 (2d Cir. 2011) (quoting Connick v. Thompson, 563 U.S. 51, 60, 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 690-91 (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); (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. Cty. 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 Nassau County. Accordingly, even as construed against Nassau County, the Complaint does not allege a plausible Section 1983 claim.

IV. Leave to Amend

Given the Second Circuit’s guidance that a pro se complaint should not be dismissed without leave to amend unless amendment would be futile, Cuoco v. Moritsugu, 222 F.3d 99, 112 (2d Cir. 2000), the Court has carefully considered whether leave to amend is warranted here. Because the defect in Plaintiff’s claim against the Jail is substantive and would not be cured if afforded an opportunity to amend, leave to amend the Complaint against the Jail is DENIED. However, in an abundance of caution,

Plaintiff is GRANTED leave to file an Amended Complaint to allege any valid claims he may have against the municipality, Nassau County, and/or any other Defendants, in accordance with the guidance set forth above. Any Amended Complaint shall be clearly labeled "Amended Complaint", shall bear the same docket number as this Order, 19-CV-1535(JS)(GRB), and shall be filed within thirty (30) days from the date of this Order. Plaintiff is cautioned that an Amended Complaint completely replaces the original complaint. Therefore, Plaintiff must include any and all claims against any Defendant(s) he seeks to pursue in the Amended Complaint. If Plaintiff does not file an Amended Complaint within the time allowed, judgment shall enter without further notice.

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 for failure to state a claim pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii), 1915A (b)(1).

Plaintiff is GRANTED leave to file an Amended Complaint in order to allege any valid claims he may have against the municipality, Nassau County, and/or any other Defendants in accordance with the guidance set forth above. Any Amended Complaint shall be clearly labeled "Amended Complaint", shall bear the same docket number as this Order, 19-CV-1535(JS)(GRB), and shall be filed within thirty (30) days from the date of this Order.

And, if Plaintiff does not file an Amended Complaint within the time allowed, judgment shall enter without further notice and the case will be closed.

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 directed to mail a copy of this Order to Plaintiff.

SO ORDERED.

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

Dated: July 10, 2019
Central Islip, New York