

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK**

**FRANCES AMATO; JOHN DOE,
progeny minor child; ADRIENNE
AUCHMOODY; TONI JEAN KULPINSKI;
VLADIMIR KULPINSKI; MICHAELA
KULPINSKI; MICHELLE ARZOLA; JANE
DOE, minor child; and JOHN DOE, minor child of
Michelle Arzola,**

Plaintiffs,

vs.

**1:17-CV-00593
(MAD/ATB)**

**JUDGE ANTHONY MCGINTY, individually
and as Ulster County Family Court Judge;
ATTORNEY ANDREW GILDAY, individually
and as a public defender of New York; AMY INGRAM,
state attorney for the child; PATRICK V. BEESMER,
individually; and PAMELA AUGUSTINE, individually,**

Defendants.

APPEARANCES:

OF COUNSEL:

FRANCES AMATO

P.O. Box 820
Marlboro, New York 12542
Plaintiff, *pro se*

Mae A. D'Agostino, U.S. District Judge:

MEMORANDUM-DECISION AND ORDER

I. INTRODUCTION

On May 26, 2017, *pro se* Plaintiff Frances Amato ("Plaintiff Amato") commenced this action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 ("Section 1983"). *See* Dkt. No. 1 at 1, 4. Plaintiff Amato is joined in this action with her son ("Plaintiff CB"); her mother, Adrienne Auchmoody ("Plaintiff Auchmoody"); Plaintiff CB's aunt, Toni Jean Kulpinski ("Plaintiff TK"); Plaintiff CB's uncle, Vladimir Kulpinski ("Plaintiff VK"); Plaintiff CB's cousin, Michaela Kulpinski ("Plaintiff MK");

Plaintiff CB's sister, Michelle Arzola ("Plaintiff Arzola"); Plaintiff CB's niece ("Plaintiff Jane Doe"); and Plaintiff CB's nephew ("Plaintiff John Doe"). *See id.* at 1-2. Plaintiffs have brought this action against Ulster County Family Court Judge Anthony McGinty ("Defendant McGinty") for his role in a decision dictating the custody of Plaintiff CB entered on October 24, 2016. *See* Dkt. No. 17 at 67; Dkt. No. 1 at 3. Plaintiffs have also sued Plaintiff CB's father, Patrick Beesmer ("Defendant Beesmer"); Plaintiff CB's assigned counsel for the custody proceedings, Amy Ingram, ("Defendant Ingram"); Defendant Beesmer's assigned counsel for the custody proceedings, Attorney Andrew Gilday ("Defendant Gilday"); and Defendant Beesmer's "paramour" as Plaintiffs refer to her, Pamela Augustine ("Defendant Augustine"), for their roles in the custody proceeding. *See* Dkt. No. 1 at 3-4.

Plaintiffs filed a motion for a temporary restraining order on June 2, 2017, *see* Dkt. No. 8, which the Court denied that day, *see* Dkt. No. 9. On June 6, 2017, Magistrate Judge Baxter issued an Order and Report-Recommendation recommending that Plaintiffs' complaint be dismissed in its entirety with prejudice as to all named Defendants in this action. *See* Dkt. No. 11 at 26. Plaintiffs submitted objections to Magistrate Judge Baxter's Order and Report-Recommendation on June 19, 2017. *See* Dkt. No. 17. Currently before the Court is Magistrate Judge Baxter's Order and Report-Recommendation and Plaintiffs' objections thereto.

II. BACKGROUND

Plaintiff Amato and Defendant Beesmer are the parents of Plaintiff CB and were involved in custody proceedings over Plaintiff CB. *See* Dkt. No. 1 at 5. According to the complaint, Defendant McGinty presided over the custody proceedings after the originally assigned judge recused herself. *See id.* In an order dated October 24, 2016, Defendant McGinty granted Defendant Beesmer primary custody of Plaintiff CB. *See* Dkt. No. 17 at 64-65, 67.

Upset with the outcome of the custody proceedings, Plaintiff Amato commenced the instant action against Defendants for their roles in the proceedings.¹ *See* Dkt. No. 1. Plaintiff Amato claims that during the custody proceedings, Defendant McGinty was "[h]ighly abusive" to "all" plaintiffs; violated Plaintiffs' "constitutional" and "ADA rights;" induced "[e]xtreme pain and suffering and trauma to all plaintiffs;" "endanger[ed] the welfare of a child;" and "[i]llegally extended fictitious authority in CLEAR ABSENCE of subject matter jurisdiction." *Id.* at 6-7. Plaintiff Amato claims that Defendant McGinty denied her access to "his court," denied her "rights to proper serving process," and denied the admission of "any evidence into the court for purpose of record." *Id.* at 7.

Plaintiff Amato claims that Defendant McGinty "co-conspired" with other Defendants in a "mock trial" to punish Plaintiff Amato for her role as an "outspoken community advocate" for human rights and family court reform. *See id.* at 7, 9, 15. Plaintiff Amato alleges that Plaintiff CB's custody proceedings were "plagued by retributions" for Plaintiff Amato's public criticism of Defendant McGinty prior to the custody proceedings. *Id.* at 7.

Plaintiff Amato alleges that Defendant McGinty, with cooperation from Defendants Ingram and Gilday, committed a number of violations resulting in the "kidnaping and endangerment of a minor." *Id.* at 8. Plaintiff Amato claims that Defendants McGinty, Ingram and Gilday committed "Malicious Trespass," "Abuse of Process," "Retaliation," "False [and] unlawful arrest," and "Child Endangerment." *See id.* at 8-9. Plaintiff Amato alleges that Defendant McGinty "[p]re decided [a] trial with no evidence allowed." *Id.* at 8.

¹ While all Plaintiffs have submitted claims against Defendants, the narrative in the complaint and objections is written in a singular voice referring to Plaintiff Amato as "I," "me," and "myself." *See generally* Dkt. Nos. 1, 17.

Plaintiffs allege "Causes of Action" for "First Amendment," "Parental Impairment," and "Due Process." *Id.* at 14-26. Plaintiffs also allege additional state law claims for "intentional and negligent emotional distress." *Id.* at 24. Plaintiffs request the "immediate return of the child," compensatory damages of \$10,000,000 on each cause of action, punitive damages, costs and attorneys' fees, and a "[j]udgment declaring the orders, edicts and processes in th[e] [c]omplaint unconstitutional[,] together with an order permanently enjoining the enforcement of [the family court] orders." *Id.* at 26.

III. DISCUSSION

A. Standard of Review

"[I]n a *pro se* case, the court must view the submissions by a more lenient standard than that accorded to 'formal pleadings drafted by lawyers.'" *Govan v. Campbell*, 289 F. Supp. 2d 289, 295 (N.D.N.Y. 2003) (quoting *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972)) (other citations omitted). The Second Circuit has opined that the court is obligated to "make reasonable allowances to protect *pro se* litigants" from inadvertently forfeiting legal rights merely because they lack a legal education. *Id.* (quoting *Traguth v. Zuck*, 710 F.2d 90, 95 (2d Cir. 1983)). However, "[t]he right of self-representation does not exempt a party from compliance with the relevant rules of procedural and substantive law." *Massie v. Ikon Office Solutions, Inc.*, 381 F. Supp. 2d 91, 94 (N.D.N.Y. 2005) (quoting *Clarke v. Bank of New York*, 687 F. Supp. 863, 871 (S.D.N.Y. 1988)).

In reviewing a report and recommendation, a district court "may accept, reject, or modify, in whole or in part, the findings or recommendations made by the magistrate judge." 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C). When a party makes specific objections to a magistrate judge's report, the district court engages in *de novo* review of the issues raised in the objections. *See id.*; *Farid v. Bouey*,

554 F. Supp. 2d 301, 307 (N.D.N.Y. 2008). When a party fails to make specific objections, the court reviews the magistrate judge's report for clear error. *See Farid*, 554 F. Supp. 2d at 307; *see also Gamble v. Barnhart*, No. 02-CV-1126, 2004 WL 2725126, *1 (S.D.N.Y. Nov. 29, 2004).

Although a *pro se* litigant's objections should be accorded leniency, "even a *pro se* party's objections to a Report and Recommendation must be specific and clearly aimed at particular findings in the magistrate's proposal, such that no party be allowed a second bite at the apple by simply relitigating a prior argument." *DiPilato v. 7-Eleven, Inc.*, 662 F. Supp. 2d 333, 340 (S.D.N.Y. 2009) (quotation omitted); *see also IndyMac Bank, F.S.B. v. Nat'l Settlement Agency, Inc.*, No. 07 Civ. 6865, 2008 WL 4810043, *1 (S.D.N.Y. Nov. 3, 2008) ("To the extent . . . that the party makes only conclusory or general arguments, or simply reiterates the original arguments, the Court will review the Report strictly for clear error.").

As mentioned, Plaintiffs have submitted objections to the Order and Report-Recommendation issued by Magistrate Judge Baxter. *See* Dkt. No. 17. The objections submitted by Plaintiffs are 117 pages long. *See id.* Despite the correct caption at the top of the document, the first 25 pages of the document appear to be an appellate brief to the State of New York Supreme Court, Appellate Division, Third Department.² *See id.* at 1-25. The remaining 92 pages include a brief analysis of custody factors, Defendant McGinty's custody decision, court transcripts, testimonial statements, and documents outlining the history of the custody proceedings. *See id.* at 25-117. There is no mention of Magistrate Judge Baxter or the Order and Report-Recommendation in any of these documents. Accordingly, Plaintiffs have failed to file

² The objections make several comments claiming that "this court" "held" or "ruled" and cited case law from the Third Department. *See, e.g.*, Dkt. No. 17 at 23.

specific objections. However, regardless of whether the Court reviews the Order and Report-Recommendation *de novo* or for clear error, Plaintiffs' complaint is still subject to dismissal.

B. Judicial Immunity

Judges are afforded absolute immunity from suit for actions related to the exercise of their judicial functions. *Pierson v. Ray*, 386 U.S. 547, 553-54 (1967). Judges maintain judicial immunity "even when [the] judge is accused of acting maliciously and corruptly." *Id.* at 554. Judicial immunity is only defeated by "nonjudicial actions, *i.e.*, actions not taken in the judge's judicial capacity;" or "actions, though judicial in nature, taken in the complete absence of all jurisdiction." *Mireles v. Waco*, 502 U.S. 9, 11 (1991) (citations omitted). A judicial action is "a function normally performed by a judge, and to the expectations of the parties." *Stump v. Sparkman*, 435 U.S. 349, 362 (1978). A judge's actions are in "absence of all jurisdiction" when the court has no "statutory or constitutional *power* to adjudicate the case." *Gross v. Rell*, 585 F.3d 72, 84 (2d Cir. 2009) (citing *United States v. Cotton*, 535 U.S. 625, 630 (2002)). Judicial actions made in error or "in excess of his authority" do not defeat judicial immunity. *Mireles*, 502 U.S. at 12-13 (quoting *Stump*, 435 U.S. at 356). Furthermore, a district court cannot grant injunctive relief "against a judicial officer for an act or omission taken in such officer's judicial capacity . . . unless a declaratory decree was violated or declaratory relief was unavailable." *Montero v. Travis*, 171 F.3d 757, 761 (2d Cir. 1999) (quotation omitted).

Plaintiffs have brought a number of allegations against Defendant McGinty, including that he violated their constitutional rights, co-conspired with the remaining Defendants, endangered the welfare of Plaintiff CB, and retaliated against Plaintiff Amato for being outspoken about Defendant McGinty's purported "abuses and discrimination against mothers and children." Dkt. No. 1 at 5-9. Accepting Plaintiff's claims as true, all claims occurred while Defendant McGinty

was working within his judicial capacity to determine the proper custody for Plaintiff CB. Accordingly, Defendant McGinty is entitled to judicial immunity. *See Mireles*, 502 U.S. at 12-13. Magistrate Judge Baxter correctly reasoned that any action Defendant McGinty committed with malice or in retaliation of Plaintiff Amato's criticisms was still performed within the judicial functions of a family court judge presiding over a custody dispute. Magistrate Judge Baxter also correctly concluded that Plaintiff's arguments with respect to N.Y. Jud. Law § 21 are unavailing, as Defendant McGinty did not violate that provision, and, even if he did, he would still be entitled to judicial immunity. *See generally Gross*, 585 F.3d at 84.

Furthermore, law guardians are entitled to quasi-judicial immunity for actions pertaining to their representation of a child in family court. *See Yapi v. Kondratyeva*, 340 Fed. Appx. 683, 685 (2d Cir. 2009) (citations omitted); *Lewittes v. Lobis*, No. 04 Civ. 0155, 2004 WL 1854082, *11 (S.D.N.Y. Aug. 19, 2004). Therefore, Magistrate Judge Baxter correctly concluded that Defendant Ingram is entitled to quasi-judicial immunity by virtue of her appointment as Plaintiff CB's law guardian. *See* Dkt. No. 11 at 12-13.

C. State Action

To state a claim under Section 1983, "a plaintiff must allege (1) 'that some person has deprived him of a federal right,' and (2) 'that the person who has deprived him of that right acted under color of state . . . law.'" *Velez v. Levy*, 401 F.3d 75, 84 (2d Cir. 2005) (quoting *Gomez v. Toledo*, 446 U.S. 635, 640 (1980)). Moreover, "[b]ecause the United States Constitution regulates only the Government, not private parties, a litigant claiming that his constitutional rights have been violated must first establish that the challenged conduct constitutes 'state action.'" *Flagg v. Yonkers Sav. & Loan Ass'n*, 396 F.3d 178, 187 (2d Cir. 2005) (quoting *United States v. Int'l Bhd. of Teamsters*, 941 F.2d 1292, 1295 (2d Cir. 1991)).

The conduct of a private actor may be considered state action when the private actor "is a willful participant in joint activity with the State or its agents." *Ciambriello v. Cty. of Nassau*, 292 F.3d 307, 324 (2d Cir. 2002) (quoting *Adickes v. S.H. Kress & Co.*, 398 U.S. 144, 152 (1970)). However, "private attorneys—even if the attorney was court appointed—are not state actors for the purposes of § 1983 claims." *Licari v. Voog*, 374 Fed. Appx. 230, 231 (2d Cir. 2010) (citing *Rodriguez v. Weprin*, 116 F.3d 62, 65-66 (2d Cir. 1997)). The mere conduct of a private party is excluded from the reach of Section 1983 "no matter how discriminatory or wrongful" that conduct may be. *American Mfrs. Mut. Ins. Co. v. Sullivan*, 526 U.S. 40, 50 (1999) (citation omitted).

Plaintiffs filed suit against Defendant Gilday for his role as Defendant Beesmer's assigned counsel and against Defendant Ingram for her role as Plaintiff CB's assigned attorney.

Defendants Gilday and Ingram, even if they were court appointed, cannot be considered state actors. *See Licari*, 374 Fed. Appx. at 231. Furthermore, Defendants Beesmer and Augustine are obvious private parties who are not state actors under Section 1983. Defendants Beesmer and Augustine had no connection to the state beyond their participation in the custody proceedings.

While Plaintiffs have claimed that Defendants Beesmer and Augustine "conspired" with the other Defendants to achieve the custody outcome, as Magistrate Judge Baxter found, there have been no facts to support these conclusory statements.³ Conspiracy allegations that are wholly conclusory are insufficient to state a claim under Section 1983. *See Tapp v. Champagne*, 164 Fed. Appx. 106, 108 (2d Cir. 2006) (citing *Ciambriello*, 292 F.3d at 325); *see also Brito v. Arthur*, 403 Fed. Appx. 620, 621 (2d Cir. 2010) ("Complaints containing only 'conclusory, vague,

³ Similarly, Plaintiffs' purported state law claims are entirely conclusory and do not come close to alleging facts to support a valid cause of action. *See* Dkt. No. 1 at 24-26.

or general allegations of a conspiracy to deprive a person of constitutional rights' will be dismissed.") (citing *Ostrer v. Aronwald*, 567 F.2d 551, 553 (2d Cir. 1977)). Accordingly, this Court agrees with Magistrate Judge Baxter that Defendants Gilday, Ingram, Beesmer, and Augustine were not state actors, and the complaint is dismissed as to each of these Defendants.

D. Minor Child Plaintiffs

An individual "who has not been admitted to the practice of law may not represent anybody other than himself." *Guest v. Hansen*, 603 F.3d 15, 20 (2d Cir. 2010) (citing *Lattanzio v. COMTA*, 481 F.3d 137, 139 (2d Cir. 2007)). Similarly, "a non-attorney parent must be represented by counsel in bringing an action on behalf of his or her child." *Cheung v. Youth Orchestra Found. of Buffalo, Inc.*, 906 F.2d 59, 61 (2d Cir. 1990). Three minor plaintiffs, Plaintiff CB, Plaintiff John Doe, and Plaintiff Jane Doe, have been listed as *pro se* litigants in this action. See Dkt. No. 1 at 1-2; Dkt. No. 11 at 16. While the adult Plaintiffs may bring this lawsuit *pro se*, they may not act as counsel for the minor children without being a licensed attorney. See *Cheung*, 906 F.2d at 61. Therefore, this Court agrees with Magistrate Judge Baxter's determination that the adult Plaintiffs in this matter may not bring suit on behalf of the minor Plaintiffs.

E. Standing

A plaintiff who wishes to invoke federal jurisdiction bears the burden of establishing that he or she has adequate standing to bring the action. *Lujan v. Defs. of Wildlife*, 504 U.S. 555, 561 (1992) (citing *FW/PBS, Inc. v. City of Dallas*, 493 U.S. 215, 231 (1990)) (other citation omitted). To establish standing, "a plaintiff is constitutionally required to have suffered (1) a concrete, particularized, and actual or imminent injury-in-fact (2) that is traceable to defendant's conduct and (3) likely to be redressed by a favorable decision." *Woods v. Empire Health Choice, Inc.*, 574

F.3d 92, 96 (2d Cir. 2009) (citations omitted). Moreover, there is a "prudential standing rule" which generally bars litigants "from asserting the rights or legal interests of others in order to obtain relief from injury to themselves." *Rajamin v. Deutsche Bank Nat'l Trust Co.*, 757 F.3d 79, 86 (2d Cir. 2014) (quotation omitted).

Here, despite multiple adult Plaintiffs filing suit against Defendants, Plaintiff Amato is the only Plaintiff that was a party to the custody proceedings regarding Plaintiff CB. Plaintiffs Auchmoody, TK, VK, MK, and Arzola only appear to be connected to the custody proceedings by their relationship with Plaintiffs Amato and CB. *See generally* Dkt. No. 1. Pursuant to the prudential standing rule, Plaintiffs Auchmoody, TK, VK, MK, and Arzola cannot assert the rights of Plaintiff Amato or Plaintiff CB. *See Rajamin*, 757 F.3d at 86. Therefore, all Plaintiffs other than Plaintiffs Amato and CB lack standing, and the complaint with respect to these Plaintiffs is dismissed.

F. Domestic Relations Exception

Magistrate Judge Baxter also noted that the Court lacks subject matter jurisdiction over several of Plaintiffs' claims pursuant to various legal doctrines. Due to the nature of Plaintiffs' complaint, it is difficult to precisely determine exactly which doctrines apply, but the Court will discuss several doctrines which preclude the Court from exercising subject matter jurisdiction over several of Plaintiffs' claims.

The domestic relations exception to federal jurisdiction divests federal courts of jurisdiction in matters involving divorce, alimony, and child custody. *Marshall v. Marshall*, 547 U.S. 293, 307-08 (2006) (citing *Ankenbrandt v. Richards*, 504 U.S. 689, 703-04 (1992)); *see also Hernstadt v. Hernstadt*, 373 F.2d 316, 317 (2d Cir. 1967) ("[I]t has been uniformly held that federal courts do not adjudicate cases involving the custody of minors"). In *Bukowski v. Spinner*,

No. 17-CV-0845, 2017 WL 1592578, *1 (E.D.N.Y. Apr. 28, 2017), the Eastern District of New York dismissed a case with similar allegations as those brought in this case.⁴

Plaintiffs allege that the "orders and processes" of the family court are unconstitutional; however, the crux of their argument arises out of the alleged improper custody determination by Defendant McGinty. *See* Dkt. No. 1 at 14-15, 21, 24, 26. Plaintiffs' alleged injuries stem directly from the disputed family court custody decision. *See id.* at 5-9, 14-16, 21, 24. Additionally, Plaintiffs request that this Court overturn the custody decision and permanently enjoin the enforcement of family court decisions. *See id.* at 26. Accordingly, to the extent that Plaintiffs request that this Court overturn the custody determination, this Court lacks jurisdiction to adjudicate such a case.

G. *Rooker-Feldman* Doctrine

"The *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine provides that the lower federal courts lack subject matter jurisdiction over a case if the exercise of jurisdiction over that case would result in the reversal or modification of a state court judgment." *Hachamovitch v. DeBuono*, 159 F.3d 687, 693 (2d Cir. 1998) (citation omitted). "Such jurisdiction is lacking because within the federal system, only the Supreme Court may review a state court judgment." *Id.*

In *Exxon Mobile Corp. v. Saudi Basic Industries Corp.*, 544 U.S. 280 (2005), the Supreme Court held that the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine "is confined to cases of the kind from which the doctrine acquired its name: cases brought by state-court losers complaining of injuries caused by state-court judgments rendered before the district court proceeding commenced and inviting district court review and rejection of those judgments." *Exxon Mobile*, 544 U.S. at 284.

⁴ The court determined that despite the plaintiff "raising constitutional issues, the allegations stem from a state domestic relations matter and are thus outside this Court's jurisdiction." *Bukowski*, 2017 WL 1592578, at *3.

In light of *Exxon Mobile*, the Second Circuit has held that "there are four 'requirements' that must be met before the *Rooker-Feldman* doctrine applies." *Green v. Mattingly*, 585 F.3d 97, 101 (2d Cir. 2009) (citation omitted). The requirements are as follows:

First, the federal-court plaintiff must have lost in state court. Second, the plaintiff must "complain[] of injuries caused by [a] state-court judgment[.]" Third, the plaintiff must "invite district court review and rejection of [that] judgment[]." Fourth, the state-court judgment must have been "rendered before the district court proceedings commenced"—i.e., *Rooker-Feldman* has no application to federal-court suits proceeding in parallel with ongoing state-court litigation.

Id. (quoting *Hoblock v. Albany County Bd. of Elections*, 422 F.3d 77, 85 (2d Cir. 2005)).

Plaintiffs request that this Court overturn and enjoin the unfavorable decisions of the family court. *See* Dkt. No. 1 at 26. Plaintiffs claim that their injuries resulted from the custody determination made by Defendant McGinty prior to the commencement of this action.⁵ *See id.* As such, to the extent that Plaintiffs seek to challenge the family court decision, this Court does not have jurisdiction to grant such relief under *Rooker-Feldman*.

H. *Younger* Abstention⁶

Younger abstention "requires federal courts to abstain from exercising jurisdiction over claims that implicate ongoing state proceedings." *Torres v. Gaines*, 130 F. Supp. 3d 630, 635 (D. Conn. 2015) (citing *Younger v. Harris*, 401 U.S. 37, 43-44 (1971)). This doctrine "applies if the federal action involves ongoing: (1) 'state criminal prosecutions'; (2) 'civil proceedings that are akin to criminal prosecutions'; or (3) civil proceedings that 'implicate a State's interest in enforcing the orders and judgments of its courts.'" *Id.* at 636 (quoting *Sprint Commc'ns, Inc. v.*

⁵ Plaintiffs filed this action on May 26, 2017 and Defendant McGinty rendered his custody determination on October 24, 2016. *See* Dkt. No. 17 at 4-5, 67.

⁶ *See Younger v. Harris*, 401 U.S. 37 (1971).

Jacobs, 134 S. Ct. 584, 588 (2013)). "If the federal action falls into one of these three categories, a [c]ourt may then consider the additional factors described in *Middlesex Cnty. Ethics Comm. v. Garden State Bar Ass'n*, 457 U.S. 423, 102 S.Ct. 2515, 73 L.Ed.2d 116 (1982)."⁷ *Id.* Since the Supreme Court's decision in *Sprint*, several courts in this Circuit have held that *Younger* abstention applies in similar circumstances as this case. *See id.*; *see also Graham v. N.Y. Ctr. for Interpersonal Dev.*, No. 15-CV-00459, 2015 WL 1120120, *2-3 (E.D.N.Y. Mar. 12, 2015) (holding that the plaintiff's claims for injunctive relief were barred by *Younger* where the plaintiff sought to challenge ongoing family court proceedings regarding the loss of custody of her son).

Accordingly, as Magistrate Judge Baxter concluded, to the extent that any issues in this litigation are still pending in family court, this Court is barred from exercising such jurisdiction pursuant to *Younger*.

I. Opportunity to Amend

When a *pro se* complaint fails to state a cause of action, the court generally "should not dismiss 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." *Cuoco v. Moritsugu*, 222 F.3d 99, 112 (2d Cir. 2000) (internal quotation and citations omitted). Of course, an opportunity to amend is not required where "[t]he problem with [the plaintiff's] causes of action is substantive" such that "better pleading will not cure it." *Id.* (citation omitted).

Defendants McGinty and Ingram are entitled to immunity, and, thus, better pleading would not be able to cure the defects in Plaintiffs' allegations against them. Defendants Gilday, Ingram, Beesmer, and Augustine were not state actors, and the conspiracy allegations against

⁷ The factors examine "whether the state interest is vital and whether the state proceeding affords an adequate opportunity to raise the constitutional claims." *Torres*, 130 F. Supp. 3d at 636

them are entirely conclusory. Therefore, better pleading would not cure the substantive defects in the complaint. Accordingly, to the extent that Plaintiffs allege constitutional and state law violations that this Court has subject matter jurisdiction over, those claims are dismissed without leave to amend with respect to all named Defendants in this action.

However, Magistrate Judge Baxter recommended that, to the extent Plaintiff Amato challenges the constitutionality of the New York Domestic Relations Law §§ 236 and 240, she may be able to do so in certain circumstances. *See* Dkt. No. 11 at 25-26. The Court agrees, and Plaintiff's complaint is dismissed without prejudice with respect to a claim challenging the constitutionality of the New York Domestic Relations Law, with only Plaintiff Amato as the named plaintiff, and the complaint must be filed against the proper defendant, at the proper time, and in the appropriate forum, as set forth more fully in the Order and Report-Recommendation. *See id.* at 25-26.

IV. CONCLUSION

After carefully reviewing the record in this matter, Plaintiffs' submissions and the applicable law, and for the above-stated reasons, the Court hereby

ORDERS that Magistrate Judge Baxter's Order and Report-Recommendation (Dkt. No. 11) is **ADOPTED** consistent with this Memorandum-Decision and Order; and the Court further

ORDERS that Plaintiffs' complaint (Dkt. No. 1) is **DISMISSED** as against Defendants McGinty, Ingram, Gilday, Beesmer, and Augustine; and the Court further

ORDERS that Plaintiff Amato's complaint (Dkt. No. 1) is **DISMISSED without prejudice** with respect to any claim challenging the constitutionality of the New York Domestic Relations Law, and only against the proper defendant for such challenge, at the proper time for such challenge, and in the proper forum, as discussed above; and the Court further

ORDERS that the Clerk of the Court shall enter judgment in Defendants' favor and close this case; and the court further

ORDERS that the Clerk of the Court shall serve a copy of this Order on Plaintiff in accordance with the Local Rules.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

Dated: September 15, 2017
Albany, New York


Mae A. D'Agostino
U.S. District Judge