

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

RODERICK J. JOHNSON,

Plaintiff,

v.

C.O. THOMAS C. WILSON, et al,

Defendants.

DECISION & ORDER

15-CV-6109L

On March 2, 2015, *pro se* plaintiff Roderick Johnson (“plaintiff”) commenced this action against the defendants pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 alleging, *inter alia*, the defendants violated his constitutional rights through excessive force and retaliation.¹ (Docket # 1). Currently pending before this Court is plaintiff’s request for appointment of counsel. (Docket # 23).

It is well settled that there is no constitutional right to appointed counsel in civil cases. Although the Court may appoint counsel to assist indigent litigants pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e), *see, e.g., Sears, Roebuck and Co. v. Charles W. Sears Real Estate, Inc.*, 865 F.2d 22, 23 (2d Cir. 1988), such assignment of counsel is clearly within the judge’s discretion. *In re Martin Trigona*, 737 F.2d 1254 (2d Cir. 1984). The factors to be considered in deciding whether or not to assign counsel include the following:

1. Whether the indigent’s claims seem likely to be of substance;
2. Whether the indigent is able to investigate the crucial facts concerning [her] claim;

¹ Plaintiff’s complaint asserted additional causes of action against additional defendants, but those claims and defendants were dismissed without prejudice. (Docket # 8).

3. Whether conflicting evidence implicating the need for cross examination will be the major proof presented to the fact finder;
4. Whether the legal issues involved are complex; and
5. Whether there are any special reasons why appointment of counsel would be more likely to lead to a just determination.

Hendricks v. Coughlin, 114 F.3d 390, 392 (2d Cir. 1997); *see also Hodge v. Police Officers*, 802 F.2d 58 (2d Cir. 1986).

The Court must consider the issue of appointment carefully, of course, because “every assignment of a volunteer lawyer to an undeserving client deprives society of a volunteer lawyer available for a deserving cause.” *Cooper v. A. Sargent Co., Inc.*, 877 F.2d 170, 172 (2d Cir. 1989). Therefore, the Court must first look to the “likelihood of merit” of the underlying dispute, *Hendricks v. Coughlin*, 114 F.3d at 392; *Cooper v. A. Sargent Co., Inc.*, 877 F.2d at 174, and “even though a claim may not be characterized as frivolous, counsel should not be appointed in a case where the merits of the . . . claim are thin and his chances of prevailing are therefore poor.” *Carmona v. United States Bureau of Prisons*, 243 F.3d 629, 632 (2d Cir. 2001) (denying counsel on appeal where petitioner’s appeal was not frivolous but nevertheless appeared to have little merit).

The Court has reviewed the facts presented herein in light of the factors required by law and finds, pursuant to the standards promulgated by *Hendricks*, 114 F.3d at 392, and *Hodge v. Police Officers*, 802 F.2d at 58, that the appointment of counsel is not necessary at this time. As stated above, a plaintiff seeking the appointment of counsel must demonstrate a likelihood of success on the merits. *See id.* Plaintiff has not done so at this stage. The legal issues in this case do not appear to be complex, nor does it appear that conflicting evidence will

implicate the need for extensive cross-examination at trial. Finally, plaintiff's case does not present any special reasons justifying the assignment of counsel. Although plaintiff states, among other things, that he suffers "from problems with [his] eyes and at times it's difficult for [him] to read without straining," nothing in plaintiff's submissions to date suggest that he is incapable of litigating this case *pro se*. On this record, plaintiff's request for the appointment of counsel (**Docket # 23**) is **DENIED without prejudice** at this time. It is the plaintiff's responsibility to retain an attorney or press forward with this lawsuit *pro se*. 28 U.S.C. § 1654.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

s/Marian W. Payson

MARIAN W. PAYSON
United States Magistrate Judge

Dated: Rochester, New York
August 7, 2017