

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

ABRAHAM SANTOS, Plaintiff)	
)	C.A. 13-2 Erie
v.)	
)	Magistrate Judge Baxter
CORRECTIONAL OFFICER BEGGS, et al., Defendants.)	

OPINION AND ORDER¹

United States Magistrate Judge Susan Paradise Baxter.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Relevant Procedural and Factual History

On January 3, 2013, Plaintiff Abraham Santos, an inmate incarcerated at the State Correctional Institution at Forest in Marienville, Pennsylvania (“SCI-Forest”), filed a *pro se* civil rights complaint pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against Defendants Correctional Officer Beggs and Sgt. R.R. Rankins [ECF No. 7]. In his *pro se* complaint, Plaintiff claims that he was subjected to at least two incidents of verbal harassment by Defendant Beggs in violation of his constitutional rights.

On June 3, 2013, the DOC Defendants filed a motion to dismiss second amended complaint [ECF No. 17], arguing that Plaintiff has failed to state a claim upon which relief may be granted. Despite having been granted ample time to do so, Plaintiff has failed to file a response to Defendants’ motion. This matter is now ripe for consideration.

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All parties have consented to having a United States Magistrate Judge exercise jurisdiction over this matter. [ECF Nos. 3, 19].

B. Standards of Review

1. Motion to Dismiss

A motion to dismiss filed pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6) must be viewed in the light most favorable to the plaintiff and all the well-pleaded allegations of the complaint must be accepted as true. Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 93-94 (2007). A complaint must be dismissed pursuant to Rule 12 (b)(6) if it does not allege “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007)(rejecting the traditional 12 (b)(6) standard set forth in Conley v. Gibson, 355 U.S. 41 (1957)). See also Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662 (2009) (specifically applying Twombly analysis beyond the context of the Sherman Act).

The Court need not accept inferences drawn by plaintiff if they are unsupported by the facts as set forth in the complaint. See California Pub. Employee Ret. Sys. v. The Chubb Corp., 394 F.3d 126, 143 (3d Cir. 2004) citing Morse v. Lower Merion School Dist., 132 F.3d 902, 906 (3d Cir. 1997). Nor must the court accept legal conclusions set forth as factual allegations. Twombly, 550 U.S. at 555, citing Papasan v. Allain, 478 U.S. 265, 286 (1986). “Factual allegations must be enough to raise a right to relief above the speculative level.” Twombly, 550 U.S. at 555. Although the United States Supreme Court does “not require heightened fact pleading of specifics, [the Court does require] enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” Id. at 570.

In other words, at the motion to dismiss stage, a plaintiff is “required to make a ‘showing’ rather than a blanket assertion of an entitlement to relief.” Smith v. Sullivan, 2008 WL 482469,

at *1 (D.Del. February 19, 2008) quoting Phillips v. County of Allegheny, 515 F.3d 224, 231 (3d Cir. 2008). “This ‘does not impose a probability requirement at the pleading stage,’ but instead ‘simply calls for enough facts to raise a reasonable expectation that discovery will reveal evidence of’ the necessary element.” Phillips, 515 F.3d at 234, quoting Twombly, 550 U.S. at 556.

Recently, the Third Circuit Court prescribed the following three-step approach to determine the sufficiency of a complaint under Twombly and Iqbal:

First, the court must ‘tak[e] note of the elements a plaintiff must plead to state a claim.’ Second, the court should identify allegations that, ‘because they are no more than conclusions, are not entitled to the assumption of truth.’ Finally, ‘where there are well-pleaded factual allegations, a court should assume their veracity and then determine whether they plausibly give rise to an entitlement for relief.’

Burtch v. Milberg Factors, Inc., 662 F.3d 212, 221 (3d Cir. 2011), citing Santiago v. Warminster Twp., 629 F.3d 121, 130 (3d Cir. 2010) (quoting Iqbal, 129 S.Ct. at 1947, 1950); see also Great Western Mining & Min. Co. v. Rothschild LLP, 615 F.3d 159, 177 (3d Cir. 2010).

2. Pro Se Pleadings

Pro se pleadings, “however inartfully pleaded,” must be held to “less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers” Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972). If the court can reasonably read pleadings to state a valid claim on which the litigant could prevail, it should do so despite failure to cite proper legal authority, confusion of legal theories, poor syntax and sentence construction, or litigant’s unfamiliarity with pleading requirements. See Boag v. MacDougall, 454 U.S. 364 (1982); United States ex rel. Montgomery v. Brierley, 414 F.2d 552,

555 (3d Cir. 1969) (“petition prepared by a prisoner... may be inartfully drawn and should be read ‘with a measure of tolerance’”); Freeman v. Department of Corrections, 949 F.2d 360 (10th Cir. 1991). Under our liberal pleading rules, a district court should construe all allegations in a complaint in favor of the complainant. Gibbs v. Roman, 116 F.3d 83 (3d Cir.1997)(overruled on other grounds). See, e.g., Nami v. Fauver, 82 F.3d 63, 65 (3d Cir. 1996)(discussing Fed.R.Civ.P. 12(b)(6) standard); Markowitz v. Northeast Land Company, 906 F.2d 100, 103 (3d Cir. 1990)(same). Because Plaintiff is a *pro se* litigant, this Court will consider facts and make inferences where it is appropriate.

C. Discussion

Plaintiff complains that he was subjected to several incidents of verbal harassment by Defendant Beggs.² Assuming Plaintiff’s allegations are true, it is well-settled that the use of words, no matter how violent, is not actionable under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. See Gannaway v. Berks County Prison, 439 Fed.Appx. 86 (3d Cir. 2011) (a claim of verbal harassment does not constitute an Eighth Amendment violation); Wright v. O’Hara, 2004 WL 1793018 at *7 (E.D.Pa. Aug. 11, 2004) (“[w]here plaintiff has not been physically assaulted, defendant’s words and gestures alone are not of constitutional merit”)(citations omitted); MacLean v. Secor, 876 F.Supp. 695, 698-99 (E.D.Pa. 1995) (“[i]t is well-established that verbal harassment or threats ... will not, without some reinforcing act accompanying them, state a constitutional claim”); Murray

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It is not at all clear from the complaint what allegations Plaintiff is asserting against Defendant Rankin.

v. Woodburn, 809, F.Supp. 383, 384 (E.D.Pa. 1993) (“Mean harassment ... is insufficient to state a constitutional deprivation”) (listing cases). Thus, Plaintiff’s claims of verbal harassment will be dismissed.

An appropriate Order follows.

