

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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Morris A. Sullivan, #0174,

Plaintiff,

vs.

Deputy Chief Attorney Joseph L. Savitz, III; and
Assistant Appellate Defender Eleanor Duffy Cleary,

Defendants.

) C/A No. 9:06-cv-00027-MBS-GRS
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) Report and Recommendation
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This is a civil action filed *pro se* by a person detained at a county detention center.¹ In the Complaint filed in this case, Plaintiff requests that this Court award him \$1, 000, 000.00 in damages from Defendants, a court-appointed appellate public defender attorney who represented Plaintiff during the direct appeal process in a criminal case, and the attorney's supervisor, also an appellate public defender. According to Plaintiff, Defendant Cleary provided "ineffective assistance of counsel" and acted unethically during her representation of Plaintiff, and Defendant Savitz failed to properly supervise Defendant Cleary, which Plaintiff calls "unprofessional conduct."

Under established local procedure in this judicial district, a careful review has been made of Plaintiff's *pro se* Complaint filed in this case. This review has been conducted pursuant to the procedural provisions of 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915, 1915A, and the Prison Litigation Reform Act of 1996, and in light of the following precedents: Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25 (1992); Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 324-25 (1989); Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519 (1972); Nasim v. Warden, Maryland House of Correction, 64 F.3d 951 (4th Cir. 1995)(*en banc*); Todd v. Baskerville, 712 F.2d 70 (4th Cir. 1983); and Boyce v. Alizaduh, 595 F.2d 948 (4th Cir. 1979).

Pro se complaints are held to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys, see

¹ Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §636(b)(1), and Local Rule 73.02(B)(2)(e), D.S.C., this magistrate judge is authorized to review all pretrial matters in such *pro se* cases and to submit findings and recommendations to the District Court. See also 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e); 1915A (as soon as possible after docketing, district courts should review prisoner cases to determine whether they are subject to summary dismissal).

Gordon v. Leeke, 574 F.2d 1147, 1151 (4th Cir. 1978), and a federal district court is charged with liberally construing a complaint filed by a *pro se* litigant to allow the development of a potentially meritorious case. See Hughes v. Rowe, 449 U.S. 5, 9-10 & n.7 (1980); Cruz v. Beto, 405 U.S. 319 (1972). When a federal court is evaluating a *pro se* complaint, the plaintiff's allegations are assumed to be true. See Fine v. City of New York, 529 F.2d 70, 74 (2d Cir. 1975). Nevertheless, the requirement of liberal construction does not mean that this Court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts which set forth a claim currently cognizable in a federal district court. See Weller v. Department of Social Servs., 901 F.2d 387(4th Cir. 1990). Even under this less stringent standard, however, the Complaint filed in this case is subject to summary dismissal under the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B).

This case is subject to summary dismissal without the issuance of process for either Defendant because there is no evident federal jurisdiction over the claims made by Plaintiff. In order for this Court to hear and decide a case, the Court must, first, have jurisdiction over the subject matter of the litigation. It is well settled that federal courts are courts of limited jurisdiction. They possess only that power authorized by Constitution and statute, see Willy v. Coastal Corp., 503 U.S. 131, 136-37 (1992); Bender v. Williamsport Area School Dist., 475 U.S. 534, 541 (1986), which is not to be expanded by judicial decree, see American Fire & Casualty Co. v. Finn, 341 U.S. 6 (1951). It is to be presumed that a cause lies outside this limited jurisdiction, see Turner v. Bank of North America, 4 U.S. (4 Dall.) 8, 11 (1799), and the burden of establishing the contrary rests upon the party asserting jurisdiction, see McNutt v. General Motors Acceptance Corp., 298 U.S. 178, 182-83 (1936). The two most commonly recognized and utilized bases for federal court jurisdiction are (1) "federal question," 28 U.S.C. § 1331, and (2) "diversity of citizenship." 28 U.S.C. § 1332. The allegations contained in the Complaint filed by Plaintiff in this case do not fall within the scope of either form of this Court's limited jurisdiction.

First, there is clearly no basis for a finding of diversity jurisdiction over this Complaint. The diversity statute, 28 U.S.C. § 1332(a), requires complete diversity of parties and an amount in controversy in excess of seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000.00):

(a) The district courts shall have original jurisdiction of all civil actions where the matter in controversy exceeds the sum or value of \$75,000, exclusive of interest and costs, and is between—

(1) citizens of different States[.]

28 U.S.C. § 1332 (emphasis added). Complete diversity of parties in a case means that no party on one side may be a citizen of the same state as any party on the other side. See Owen Equip. & Erection Co. v. Kroger, 437 U.S. 365, 372-74 & nn. 13-16 (1978). Plaintiff's claims are, essentially, legal malpractice claims. Although a civil action for legal malpractice would be cognizable in this Court under the diversity statute if that statute's requirements are satisfied, see Cianbro Corporation v. Jeffcoat and Martin, 804 F. Supp. 784, 788-91 (D.S.C. 1992), there does not appear to be diversity in this case. According to the information provided by Plaintiff when he filed his Complaint, Plaintiff is a resident of Greenville County, South Carolina and both Defendants reside in Richland County, South Carolina, thus eliminating the possibility of diversity jurisdiction in this case. Although Plaintiff's request for damages in this case would appear to satisfy the \$75,000 jurisdictional amount in controversy requirement for diversity jurisdiction, that fact is irrelevant in this case because, in absence of diversity of citizenship, the amount in controversy does not come into play.

Second, the essential allegations contained in the Complaint are insufficient to show that the case is one "arising under the Constitution, laws, or treaties of the United States." 28 U.S.C. § 1331. That is, the Complaint does not state a claim cognizable under this Court's "federal question" jurisdiction. Plaintiff does not specifically claim that either Defendant violated his constitutional rights during Defendant Cleary's representation of Plaintiff. However, since he does

claim that Defendants "caused" him to spend more time in prison than he should have, it is conceivable that under the liberal construction rule for *pro se* pleadings, such a claim of constitutional violation could be inferred under the circumstances, and could, if otherwise proper, fall within this Court's federal question jurisdiction under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.² However, even with the consideration of such an implied assertion, it is clear that no viable federal question claim is stated against Defendants in this case.

In order to state a valid claim for damages under § 1983, an aggrieved party must sufficiently allege that he or she was injured by "the deprivation of any [of his or her] rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the [United States] Constitution and laws" by a "person" acting "under color of state law." See 42 U.S.C. § 1983; Monroe v. Pape, 365 U.S. 167 (1961); see generally 5 Charles Alan Wright & Arthur R. Miller, Federal Practice and Procedure § 1230 (2002). It is clear in this case that neither Defendant Cleary nor Defendant Savitz has acted under color of state law in their associations with Plaintiff, and this circumstance is fatal to any § 1983 claim asserted by Plaintiff. It is well settled that a criminal defense attorney, whether retained, court-appointed, or a public defender as here, does not act under color of state law, which is a jurisdictional prerequisite for any civil action brought under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. See Deas v. Potts, 547 F.2d 800 (4th Cir. 1976)(private attorney); Hall v. Quillen, 631 F.2d 1154, 1155-56 & nn. 2-3 (4th Cir. 1980), *cert. denied*, 454 U.S. 1141 (1982)(court-appointed attorney); Polk County v. Dodson, 454 U.S. 312, 317-24 & nn. 8-16 (1981)(public defender).

The district court in Hall v. Quillen, disposed of the case against a physician and a court-appointed attorney on grounds of immunity. In affirming the district court's order, the Court of

²Plaintiff's Complaint is properly before this Court pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Section 1983 is the procedural mechanism through which Congress provided a private civil cause of action based on allegations of federal constitutional violations by persons acting under color of state law. See Jennings v. Davis, 476 F.2d 1271 (8th Cir. 1973). The purpose of section 1983 is to deter state actors from using badge of their authority to deprive individuals of their *federally guaranteed* rights and to provide relief to victims if such deterrence fails. See McKnight v. Rees, 88 F.3d 417(6th Cir. 1996)(emphasis added).

Appeals, however, indicated that lower courts should first determine whether state action occurred:

. . . immunity as a defense only becomes a relevant issue in a case such as this if the court has already determined affirmatively that the action of the defendant represented state action. This is so because state action is an essential preliminary condition to § 1983 jurisdiction, and a failure to find state action disposes of such an action adversely to the plaintiff.

Hall v. Quillen, 631 F.2d at 1155 (citations omitted); see *a/so* Lugar v. Edmondson Oil Co., 457 U.S. 922, 936 (1982) ("Careful adherence to the 'state action' requirement . . . also avoids imposing on the State, its agencies or officials, responsibility for conduct for which they cannot fairly be blamed."). With regard to Plaintiff's claims against his appellate public defender's supervisor for alleged inadequate supervision, it is also well settled that claims of vicarious liability are generally not allowable under § 1983 in absence of specific allegations that are not present in this case. See Shaw v. Stroud, 13 F.3d 791 (4th Cir. 1994); Slakan v. Porter, 737 F.2d 368, 370-75 (4th Cir. 1984).

Finally, Plaintiff's other claims of un-ethical behavior and ineffective assistance/legal malpractice, which are negligence-based claims, are not actionable under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. See Daniels v. Williams, 474 U.S. 327, 328-336 & n. 3 (1986); Davidson v. Cannon, 474 U.S. 344, 345-348 (1986); Ruefly v. Landon, 825 F.2d 792, 793-794 (4th Cir. 1987); Pink v. Lester, 52 F.3d 73 (4th Cir. 1995) (applying Daniels v. Williams and Ruefly v. Landon: "The district court properly held that *Daniels* bars an action under § 1983 for negligent conduct[.]"). Section 1983 does not impose liability for violations of duties of care arising under state law. See DeShaney v. Winnebago County Department of Social Services, 489 U.S. 189, 200-03 (1989). Negligence and legal malpractice are causes of action under South Carolina law and are properly brought in state court in absence of federal diversity jurisdiction. See, e.g., Mitchell v. Holler, 311 S.C. 406, 429 S.E.2d 793 (1993); Yarborough v. Rogers, 306 S.C. 260, 411 S.E.2d 424 (1991). Plaintiff

should be aware of the state statute of limitations on such negligence/malpractice actions which is, generally, three years from the time of the alleged injury to the client. See Epstein v. Brown, 363 S.C. 372, 610 S.E.2d 816 (2005); see also S.C. Code Ann. §§ 15-3-530; 15-3-535 (Supp. 2003).

Recommendation

Accordingly, it is recommended that the District Court dismiss the Complaint in this case *without prejudice* and without issuance and service of process. See Denton v. Hernandez; Neitzke v. Williams; Haines v. Kerner; Brown v. Briscoe, 998 F.2d 201, 202-04 & n. * (4th Cir. 1993); Boyce v. Alizaduh; Todd v. Baskerville, 712 F.2d at 74; see also 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B); 28 U.S.C. § 1915A (as soon as possible after docketing, district courts should review prisoner cases to determine whether they are subject to summary dismissal). Plaintiff's attention is directed to the important notice on the next page.

Respectfully submitted,



George C. Kosko
United States Magistrate Judge

January 12, 2006
Charleston, South Carolina

Notice of Right to File Objections to Magistrate Judge's "Report and Recommendation"
& The *Serious Consequences* of a Failure to Do So

The parties are hereby notified that any objections to the attached Report and Recommendation (or Order and Recommendation) must be filed within **ten (10) days** of the date of its filing. 28 U.S.C. § 636; Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b). The time calculation of this ten-day period excludes weekends and holidays and provides for an additional three days for filing by mail. Fed. R. Civ. P. 6. A magistrate judge makes only a recommendation, and the authority to make a final determination in this case rests with the United States District Judge. See Mathews v. Weber, 423 U.S. 261, 270-71 (1976); Estrada v. Witkowski, 816 F. Supp. 408, 410 (D.S.C. 1993).

During the period for filing objections, **but not thereafter**, a party must file with the Clerk of Court specific, written objections to the Report and Recommendation, if he or she wishes the United States District Judge to consider any objections. **Any written objections must specifically identify the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objections are made and the basis for such objections.** See Keeler v. Pea, 782 F. Supp. 42, 43-44 (D.S.C. 1992); Oliverson v. West Valley City, 875 F. Supp. 1465, 1467 (D. Utah 1995). Failure to file specific, written objections shall constitute a waiver of a party's right to further judicial review, including appellate review, if the recommendation is accepted by the United States District Judge. See United States v. Schronce, 727 F.2d 91, 94 & n. 4 (4th Cir. 1984); Wright v. Collins, 766 F.2d 841, 845-847 & nn. 1-3 (4th Cir. 1985). Moreover, if a party files specific objections to a portion of a magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation, but does not file specific objections to other portions of the Report and Recommendation, that party waives appellate review of the portions of the magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation to which he or she did not object. In other words, a party's failure to object to one issue in a magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation precludes that party from subsequently raising that issue on appeal, even if objections are filed on other issues. See Howard v. Secretary of HHS, 932 F.2d 505, 508-509 (6th Cir. 1991); see also Praylow v. Martin, 761 F.2d 179, 180 n. 1 (4th Cir.) (party precluded from raising on appeal factual issue to which it did not object in the district court), *cert. denied*, 474 U.S. 1009 (1985). In Howard, the court stated that general, non-specific objections are *not* sufficient:

A general objection to the entirety of the [magistrate judge's] report has the same effects as would a failure to object. The district court's attention is not focused on any specific issues for review, thereby making the initial reference to the [magistrate judge] useless. * * * This duplication of time and effort wastes judicial resources rather than saving them, and runs contrary to the purposes of the Magistrates Act. * * * We would hardly countenance an appellant's brief simply objecting to the district court's determination without explaining the source of the error.

Accord Lockert v. Faulkner, 843 F.2d 1015, 1017-1019 (7th Cir. 1988), where the court held that the appellant, who proceeded *pro se* in the district court, was barred from raising issues on appeal that he did not specifically raise in his objections to the district court:

Just as a complaint stating only 'I complain' states no claim, an objection stating only 'I object' preserves no issue for review. * * * A district judge should not have to guess what arguments an objecting party depends on when reviewing a [magistrate judge's] report.

See also Branch v. Martin, 886 F.2d 1043, 1046 (8th Cir. 1989) ("no de novo review if objections are untimely or general"; which involved a *pro se* litigant); Goney v. Clark, 749 F.2d 5, 7 n. 1 (3d Cir. 1984) ("plaintiff's objections lacked the specificity to trigger *de novo* review"). **This notice, hereby, apprises the parties of the consequences of a failure to file specific, written objections.** See Wright v. Collins; Small v. Secretary of HHS, 892 F.2d 15, 16 (2d Cir. 1989). Filing by mail pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 5 may be accomplished by mailing objections addressed as follows:

Larry W. Propes, Clerk
United States District Court
Post Office Box 835
Charleston, South Carolina 29402