

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE
WESTERN DIVISION

KRISTOPHER D. SAMPLE,	}	
	}	
Plaintiff,	}	
	}	
vs.	}	No. 11-2136-STA-cgc
	}	
BARRY P. PHILLIPS, et al.,	}	
	}	
Defendants.	}	
	}	

ORDER OF DISMISSAL
ORDER CERTIFYING APPEAL WOULD NOT BE TAKEN IN GOOD FAITH
AND
ORDER DENYING LEAVE TO PROCEED IN FORMA PAUPERIS ON APPEAL

On February 18, 2011, Plaintiff Kristopher D. Sample, booking number 10136043, who is currently an inmate at the Shelby County Correction Center in Memphis, Tennessee, filed a pro se Complaint, accompanied by a motion seeking leave to proceed in forma pauperis. (ECF Nos. 1 & 2.) The Court issued an order on March 9, 2011, granting leave to proceed in forma pauperis and assessing the civil filing fee. (ECF No. 5.) The Clerk shall record the defendants as Barry B. Phillips and the Regional Medical Center at Memphis d/b/a The Med.¹ Defendant Phillips is a medical doctor. The Complaint seeks money damages in the amount of \$3.5 million for

¹ Although the case caption uses the designation "et al.", the Court will not speculate about the identity of any other person or entity Plaintiff intends to sue.

"Gross Negligence, Malpractice, Discrimination, Pain and Suffering, etc." (ECF No. 1 at 3.)

The Court is required to screen prisoner complaints and to dismiss any complaint, or any portion thereof, if the complaint—

(1) is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted; or

(2) seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief.

28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b); see also 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B).

In assessing whether the complaint in this case states a claim on which relief may be granted, the standards under Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6), as stated in Ashcroft v. Iqbal, ___ U.S. ___, ___, 129 S. Ct. 1937, 1949-50, 173 L. Ed. 2d 868 (2009), and in Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555-57, 127 S. Ct. 1955, 167 L. Ed. 2d 929 (2007), are applied. Hill v. Lappin, 630 F.3d 468, 470-71 (6th Cir. 2010). "Accepting all well-pleaded allegations in the complaint as true, the Court 'consider[s] the factual allegations in [the] complaint to determine if they plausibly suggest an entitlement to relief.'" Williams v. Curtin, 631 F.3d 380, 383 (6th Cir. 2011) (quoting Iqbal, ___ U.S. at ___, 129 S. Ct. at 1951) (alteration in original). "[P]leadings that . . . are no more than conclusions . . . are not entitled to the assumption of truth. While legal conclusions can provide the framework of a complaint, they must be supported by factual allegations." Iqbal, ___ U.S. at ___, 129 S. Ct. at 1950; see also

Twombly, 550 U.S. at 555 n.3, 127 S. Ct. at 1964-65 n.3 ("Rule 8(a)(2) still requires a 'showing,' rather than a blanket assertion, of entitlement to relief. Without some factual allegation in the complaint, it is hard to see how a claimant could satisfy the requirement of providing not only 'fair notice' of the nature of the claim, but also 'grounds' on which the claim rests.")

"A complaint can be frivolous either factually or legally. See Neitzke [v. Williams], 490 U.S. [319,] 325, 109 S. Ct. at 1827 [(1989)]. Any complaint that is legally frivolous would ipso facto fail to state a claim upon which relief can be granted. See id. at 328-29, 109 S. Ct. 1827." Hill, 630 F.3d at 470.

Whether a complaint is factually frivolous under §§ 1915A(b)(1) and 1915(e)(2)(B)(i) is a separate issue from whether it fails to state a claim for relief. Statutes allowing a complaint to be dismissed as frivolous give "judges not only the authority to dismiss a claim based on an indisputably meritless legal theory, but also the unusual power to pierce the veil of the complaint's factual allegations and dismiss those claims whose factual contentions are clearly baseless." Neitzke, 490 U.S. at 327, 109 S. Ct. 1827 (interpreting 28 U.S.C. § 1915). Unlike a dismissal for failure to state a claim, where a judge must accept all factual allegations as true, Iqbal, 129 S. Ct. at 1949-50, a judge does not have to accept "fantastic or delusional" factual allegations as true in prisoner complaints that are reviewed for frivolousness. Neitzke, 490 U.S. at 327-28, 109 S. Ct. 1827.

Id. at 471.

"Pro se complaints are to be held 'to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers,' and should therefore be liberally construed." Williams, 631 F.3d at 383

(quoting Martin v. Overton, 391 F.3d 710, 712 (6th Cir. 2004)). Pro se litigants and prisoners are not exempt from the requirements of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. As the Sixth Circuit has explained:

Before the recent onslaught of pro se prisoner suits, the Supreme Court suggested that pro se complaints are to be held to a less stringent standard than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers. See Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 92 S. Ct. 594, 30 L. Ed. 2d 652 (1972) (per curiam). Neither that Court nor other courts, however, have been willing to abrogate basic pleading essentials in pro se suits. See, e.g., id. at 521, 92 S. Ct. at 596 (holding petitioner to standards of Conley v. Gibson); Merritt v. Faulkner, 697 F.2d 761 (7th Cir.) (duty to be less stringent with pro se complaint does not require court to conjure up unplead allegations), cert. denied, 464 U.S. 986, 104 S. Ct. 434, 78 L. Ed. 2d 3366 (1983); McDonald v. Hall, 610 F.2d 16 (1st Cir.1979) (same); Jarrell v. Tisch, 656 F. Supp. 237 (D.D.C. 1987) (pro se plaintiffs should plead with requisite specificity so as to give defendants notice); Holsey v. Collins, 90 F.R.D. 122 (D. Md. 1981) (even pro se litigants must meet some minimum standards).

Wells v. Brown, 891 F.2d 591, 594 (6th Cir. 1989); see also Brown v. Matauszak, No. 09-2259, 2011 WL 285251, at *5 (6th Cir. Jan. 31, 2011) (affirming dismissal of pro se complaint for failure to comply with "unique pleading requirements"; "[A] court cannot 'create a claim which [a plaintiff] has not spelled out in his pleading.'" (quoting Clark v. Nat'l Travelers Life Ins. Co., 518 F.2d 1167, 1169 (6th Cir. 1975)) (alteration in original); Payne v. Secretary of Treas., 73 F. App'x 836, 837 (6th Cir. 2003) (affirming sua sponte dismissal of complaint pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2); "Neither this court nor the district court is

required to create Payne's claim for her."); cf. Pliler v. Ford, 542 U.S. 225, 231, 124 S. Ct. 2441, 2446, 159 L. Ed. 2d 338 (2004) ("District judges have no obligation to act as counsel or paralegal to pro se litigants.").

The first issue is whether this Court has subject-matter jurisdiction over this action. "Federal courts are courts of limited jurisdiction. They possess only that power authorized by Constitution and statute, which is not to be expanded by judicial decree. It is to be presumed that a cause lies outside this limited jurisdiction, and the burden of establishing the contrary rests upon the party asserting jurisdiction." Kokkonen v. Guardian Life Ins. Co., 511 U.S. 375, 114 S. Ct. 1673, 128 L. Ed 2d 391 (1994) (citations omitted); see also Bender v. Williamsport Area Sch. Dist., 475 U.S. 534, 541, 106 S. Ct. 1326, 1331, 89 L. Ed. 2d 501 (1986) ("Federal courts are not courts of general jurisdiction; they have only the power that is authorized by Article III of the Constitution and the statutes enacted by Congress pursuant thereto."); Insurance Corp. of Ireland, Ltd. v. Compagnie des Bauxite de Guinee, 456 U.S. 694, 701, 102 S. Ct. 2099, 2104, 72 L. Ed. 2d 492 (1982) ("Federal courts are courts of limited jurisdiction. The character of the controversies over which federal judicial authority may extend are delineated in Art. III, § 2, cl. 1. Jurisdiction of the lower federal courts is further limited to those subjects encompassed within a statutory grant of

jurisdiction."); Owen Equip. & Erection Co. v. Kroger, 437 U.S. 365, 374, 98 S. Ct. 2396, 2403, 57 L. Ed. 2d 274 (1978) ("It is a fundamental precept that federal courts are courts of limited jurisdiction."). Federal courts are obliged to act sua sponte whenever a question concerning jurisdiction arises. See, e.g., Insurance Corp. of Ireland, Ltd., 456 U.S. at 702, 102 S. Ct. at 2104 ("a court, including an appellate court, will raise lack of subject-matter jurisdiction on its own motion"); St. Paul Mercury Indem. Co. v. Red Cab Co., 303 U.S. 283, 287 n.10, 58 S. Ct. 586, 589 n.10, 82 L. Ed. 845 (1938); Answers in Genesis, Inc. v. Creation Ministries Int'l, Ltd., 556 F.3d 459, 465 (6th Cir. 2009) ("federal courts have a duty to consider their subject matter jurisdiction in regard to every case and may raise the issue sua sponte").

Pursuant to Rule 8(a)(1) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, "[a] pleading that states a claim for relief must contain . . . a short and plain statement of the grounds for the court's jurisdiction." Plaintiff's Complaint contains no jurisdictional allegations. It does not appear that the Court has jurisdiction under the most common provisions relied on in cases of this nature.

Under 28 U.S.C. § 1331, which governs federal question jurisdiction, "[t]he district courts shall have original jurisdiction of all civil actions arising under the Constitution,

laws, or treaties of the United States." Plaintiff's Complaint does not mention the United States Constitution or any federal law or treaty and, therefore, the Court does not have federal question jurisdiction.

The Court also does not appear to have diversity jurisdiction. Diversity of citizenship means that the action is between "citizens of different States." 28 U.S.C. § 1332(a). A federal court has jurisdiction under § 1332 only if there is "complete diversity between all plaintiffs and all defendants." Lincoln Prop. Co. v. Roche, 546 U.S. 81, 89, 126 S. Ct. 606, 613, 163 L. Ed. 2d 415 (2005) (citations omitted). "To establish diversity jurisdiction, one must plead the citizenship of the corporate and individual parties." Naartex Consulting Corp. v. Watt, 722 F.2d 779, 792 n.20 (D.C. Cir. 1983); see also Johnson v. New York, 315 F. App'x 394, 395 (3d Cir. 2009) (per curiam); Sanders v. Clemco Indus., 823 F.2d 214, 216 (8th Cir. 1987) (complaint did not properly allege diversity jurisdiction); Leys v. Lowe's Home Centers, Inc., 601 F. Supp. 2d 908, 912-13 (W.D. Mich. 2009) (complaint and notice of removal did not adequately establish diversity jurisdiction); Ellis v. Kaye-Kibbey, No. 1:07-cv-910, 2008 WL 2696891, at *2-3 (W.D. Mich. July 1, 2008) (dismissing complaint for failure adequately to allege facts establishing diversity of citizenship despite conclusory allegation that

diversity exists); 5 Charles Alan Wright & Arthur R. Miller, Federal Practice and Procedure § 1208 (3d ed. 2004).

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1332(c)(1), "a corporation shall be deemed to be a citizen of any State by which it has been incorporated and of the State where it has its principal place of business." The Med is operated by the Shelby County Health Care Corporation, <http://www.the-med.org/about-the-med/governance/>, a Tennessee corporation.² Therefore, there is no diversity jurisdiction even if Defendant Phillips is not a resident of Tennessee.

Therefore, the Court DISMISSES the action for want of subject-matter jurisdiction pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(1) and (h)(3). This dismissal is WITHOUT PREJUDICE. Judgment shall be entered for Defendants.

The Court must also consider whether Plaintiff should be allowed to appeal this decision in forma pauperis, should he seek to do so. Twenty-eight U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3) provides that "[a]n appeal may not be taken in forma pauperis if the trial court certifies in writing that it is not taken in good faith."

The good faith standard is an objective one. Coppedge v. United States, 369 U.S. 438, 445, 82 S. Ct. 917, 921, 8 L. Ed. 2d 21 (1962). The test under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a) for whether an appeal

² Information about the Shelby County Health Care Corporation is available from WESTLAW, Corporate Records & Business Registrations. It is also likely that the principal place of business of the Shelby County Health Care Corporation is Tennessee.

is taken in good faith is whether the litigant seeks appellate review of any issue that is not frivolous. Id. It would be inconsistent for a district court to determine that a complaint should be dismissed prior to service on the defendants, but has sufficient merit to support an appeal in forma pauperis. See Williams v. Kullman, 722 F.2d 1048, 1050 n.1 (2d Cir. 1983). The same considerations that lead the Court to dismiss this case for want of subject-matter jurisdiction also compel the conclusion that an appeal would not be taken in good faith. It is therefore CERTIFIED, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3), that any appeal in this matter by Plaintiff would not be taken in good faith and Plaintiff may not proceed on appeal in forma pauperis.

The next matter to be addressed is the assessment of a filing fee if Plaintiff appeals the dismissal of this case. In McGore v. Wrigglesworth, 114 F.3d 601, 610-11 (6th Cir. 1997), the Sixth Circuit set out specific procedures for implementing the PLRA. Therefore, Plaintiff is instructed that, if he wishes to take advantage of the installment procedures for paying the appellate

filing fee, he must comply with the procedures set out in McGore and 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b).³

IT IS SO ORDERED this 24th day of May, 2011.

s/ S. Thomas Anderson
S. THOMAS ANDERSON
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

³ Because the Complaint was not dismissed for failure to state a claim or as frivolous, the Court does not assess a "strike" under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g). See Thompson v. Drug Enforcement Admin., 492 F.3d 428, 437 (D.C. Cir. 2007).