

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE
WESTERN DIVISION

LUGENE DAVIS,)	
)	
Plaintiff,)	
)	
VS.)	No. 15-2031-JDT-tmp
)	
GREGORY ALLEN,)	
)	
Defendant.)	

ORDER DISMISSING COMPLAINT,
CERTIFYING AN APPEAL WOULD NOT BE TAKEN IN GOOD FAITH,
NOTIFYING PLAINTIFF OF APPELLATE FILING FEE AND
NOTIFYING PLAINTIFF OF RESTRICTIONS UNDER 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g)

On January 12, 2015, Plaintiff Lugene Davis (“Davis”), an inmate at the South Central Correctional Facility in Clifton, Tennessee, filed a *pro se* complaint pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, accompanied by a motion for leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*. (ECF Nos. 1 & 2.) In an order issued on January 14, 2015, the Court granted leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* and assessed the civil filing fee pursuant to the Prison Litigation Reform Act (“PLRA”), 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(a)-(b). (ECF No. 4.) The Clerk shall record the Defendant as attorney Gregory Allen.

I. The Complaint

Davis alleges that on October 21, 2014, Defendant Allen coerced him into signing a plea agreement for fifteen years by telling him that he would get sixty-three years at

trial. (ECF No. 1 at 3.) Davis contends that he was incarcerated “from September 23, 2013 til I was given an add on November 9, 2013 because they never had my DNA. I was being illegally [de]tained.” (*Id.*) Davis alleges he was sentenced on October 21, 2014 despite the district attorney stating that the DNA from the baseball cap did not match the defendant. (*Id.*)

Davis contends that he “signed under the North Carolina plea in which Mr. Allen is in violation of insufficient counseling and false imprisonment.” (*Id.*) Davis seeks \$1,000 for every day he has been illegally detained, that Defendant Allen be disbarred, and to have the “false burglary” off his record. (*Id.* at 4.)

II. Analysis

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 court applies the standards under Federal Rules of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6), as stated in *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 677-79 (2009), and in *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555-57 (2007). *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*, 556 U.S. at 681) (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*, 556 U.S. at 679; *see also Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555 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. Any complaint that is legally frivolous would *ipso facto* fail to state a claim upon which relief can be granted.” *Hill*, 630 F.3d at 470 (citing *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325, 328-29 (1989)).

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. *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” and stating “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. Sec’y 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) and stating, “[n]either this court nor the district court is required to create Payne’s claim for her”); *cf. Pliler v. Ford*, 542 U.S. 225, 231 (2004) (“District judges have no obligation to act as counsel or paralegal to *pro se* litigants.”); *Young Bok Song v. Gipson*, 423 F. App’x 506, 510 (6th Cir. 2011) (“[W]e decline to affirmatively require courts to ferret out the strongest cause of action on behalf of *pro se* litigants. Not only would that duty be overly burdensome, it would transform the courts from neutral arbiters of disputes into advocates for a particular party. While courts are properly charged with protecting the rights of all who come before it, that responsibility does not encompass advising litigants as to what legal theories they should pursue.”).

Davis filed his complaint on the court-supplied form for actions under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Section 1983 provides:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory or the District of Columbia, subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other

person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress, except that in any action brought against a judicial officer for an act or omission taken in such officer's judicial capacity, injunctive relief shall not be granted unless a declaratory decree was violated or declaratory relief was unavailable. For the purposes of this section, any Act of Congress applicable exclusively to the District of Columbia shall be considered to be a statute of the District of Columbia.

To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege two elements: (1) a deprivation of rights secured by the “Constitution and laws” of the United States (2) committed by a defendant acting under color of state law. *Adickes v. S.H. Kress & Co.*, 398 U.S. 144, 150 (1970).

Davis has no claim against Defendant Allen. Courts have uniformly held that attorneys are not state actors who can be sued under § 1983. *See Polk County v. Dodson*, 454 U.S. 312, 325 (1981) (“[A] public defender does not act under color of state law when performing a lawyer’s traditional functions as counsel to a defendant in a criminal proceeding.”); *Deas v. Potts*, 547 F.2d 800 (4th Cir. 1976) (“A private attorney who is retained to represent a criminal defendant is not acting under color of state law, and therefore is not amendable to suit under § 1983.”); *Mulligan v. Schlachter*, 389 F.2d 231, 233 (6th Cir. 1968) (private attorney who is appointed by the court does not act under color of state law); *Haley v. Walker*, 751 F.2d 284, 285 (8th Cir. 1984) (per curiam) (attorney appointed by federal court is not a federal officer who can be sued under *Bivens*).

For the foregoing reasons, Davis’s complaint is subject to dismissal in its entirety for failure to state a claim on which relief can be granted.

III. Standard for Leave to Amend

The Sixth Circuit has held that a district court may allow a prisoner to amend his complaint to avoid a *sua sponte* dismissal under the PLRA. *LaFountain v. Harry*, 716 F.3d 944, 951 (6th Cir. 2013); *see also Brown v. R.I.*, No. 12-1403, 2013 WL 646489, at *1 (1st Cir. Feb. 22, 2013) (per curiam) (“Ordinarily, before dismissal for failure to state a claim is ordered, some form of notice and an opportunity to cure the deficiencies in the complaint must be afforded.”). Leave to amend is not required where a deficiency cannot be cured. *Brown*, 2013 WL 646489, at *1; *Gonzalez-Gonzalez v. United States*, 257 F.3d 31, 37 (1st Cir. 2001) (“This does not mean, of course, that every *sua sponte* dismissal entered without prior notice to the plaintiff automatically must be reversed. If it is crystal clear that the plaintiff cannot prevail and that amending the complaint would be futile, then a *sua sponte* dismissal may stand.”); *Grayson v. Mayview State Hosp.*, 293 F.3d 103, 114 (3d Cir. 2002) (“*in forma pauperis* plaintiffs who file complaints subject to dismissal under Rule 12(b)(6) should receive leave to amend unless amendment would be inequitable or futile”); *Curley v. Perry*, 246 F.3d 1278, 1284 (10th Cir. 2001) (“We agree with the majority view that *sua sponte* dismissal of a meritless complaint that cannot be salvaged by amendment comports with due process and does not infringe the right of access to the courts.”). In this case, because the deficiencies in Davis’s complaint cannot be cured, leave to amend is not warranted.

IV. Appeal Issues

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §1915(a)(3), the Court must also consider whether an appeal by Davis in this case would be taken in good faith. The good faith standard is an

objective one. *Coppedge v. United States*, 369 U.S. 438, 445 (1962). The test for whether an appeal 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 failure to state a claim also compel the conclusion that an appeal would not be taken in good faith.

V. Conclusion

The Court DISMISSES Davis's complaint for failure to state a claim on which relief can be granted, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) and 1915A(b)(1). Leave to amend is DENIED because the deficiencies in Davis's complaint cannot be cured. It is also CERTIFIED, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3), that any appeal in this matter by Davis would not be taken in good faith.

The Court must also address the assessment of the \$505 appellate filing fee if Davis nevertheless appeals the dismissal of this case. A certification that an appeal is not taken in good faith does not affect an indigent prisoner plaintiff's ability to take advantage of the installment procedures contained in § 1915(b). See *McGore v. Wrigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601, 610-11 (6th Cir. 1997), *partially overruled on other grounds by LaFountain*, 716 F.3d at 951. *McGore* sets out specific procedures for implementing the PLRA, 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)-(b). Therefore, Davis 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 § 1915(a)(2) by filing an updated *in forma pauperis* affidavit and a current, certified copy of his inmate trust account for the six months immediately preceding the filing of the notice of appeal.

Finally, for analysis under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g) of future filings, if any, by Plaintiff, this is the third dismissal of one of his cases as frivolous or for failure to state a claim.¹ Section 1915(g) provides:

In no event shall a prisoner bring a civil action or appeal a judgment in a civil action or proceeding under this section if the prisoner has, on 3 or more prior occasions, while incarcerated or detained in any facility, brought an action or appeal in a court of the United States that was dismissed on the ground that it is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, unless the prisoner is under imminent danger of serious physical injury.

28 U.S.C. § 1915(g). Consequently, Plaintiff is warned that he is barred from filing any further actions *in forma pauperis* while he is a prisoner within the meaning of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(h) unless he is in imminent danger of serious physical injury. Any civil action filed by Plaintiff after the date of the judgment in this case must be accompanied by either the \$400 civil filing fee or allegations sufficient to show that, at the time of filing the action, he is in imminent danger of serious physical injury. If Plaintiff submits any complaint that does not allege he is under imminent danger of serious physical injury or is not accompanied by the filing fee, the complaint will be filed, but Plaintiff will be required to remit the full filing fee. If he fails to do so, the case will be dismissed, and

¹ Plaintiff previously filed *Davis v. Beasley, et al.*, No. 14-2099-JDT-tmp (W.D. Tenn. Jan. 14, 2016) (dismissed for failure to state a claim), and *Davis v. Weirich, et al.*, No. 14-2531-JDT-tmp (W.D. Tenn. Feb. 20, 2015) (dismissed for failure to state a claim).

the filing fee will be assessed from his inmate trust account without regard to the installment payment procedures of 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(a)-(b).²

The Clerk is directed to prepare a judgment.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

s/ **James D. Todd**
JAMES D. TODD
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

² Plaintiff is further cautioned that, if he attempts to evade the § 1915(g) restriction by filing actions in other jurisdictions that are then transferred or removed to this district, the Court may impose a monetary sanction in the full amount of the civil filing fee.