
THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF UTAH

JERRY ERNEST LOPEZ,
Plaintiff,

v.

DAVIS COUNTY et al.,
Defendants.

**MEMORANDUM DECISION &
ORDER TO CURE DEFICIENT
AMENDED COMPLAINT**

Case No. 1:21-CV-114-DBB

District Judge David Barlow

Plaintiff, former inmate Jerry Ernest Lopez, brings this *pro se* civil-rights action, *see* 42 U.S.C.S. § 1983 (2022),¹ *in forma pauperis*, *see* 28 *id.* § 1915. Plaintiff had also brought another civil-rights action, which has since been consolidated with this action. *Lopez v. Davis Cnty.*, No. 1:22-CV-12-DBB (D. Utah May 31, 2022). Having now screened the relevant complaints, *id.*, ECF No. 4; (ECF No. 14), under its statutory review function,² the Court orders Plaintiff to file a second amended complaint to cure deficiencies before further pursuing claims.

¹The federal statute creating a “civil action for deprivation of rights” reads, in pertinent part:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory . . . , 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.

42 U.S.C.S. § 1983 (2022).

² The screening statute reads:

(a) Screening.—The court shall review . . . a complaint in a civil action in which a prisoner seeks redress from a governmental entity or officer or employee of a governmental entity.

(b) Grounds for dismissal.—On review, the court shall identify cognizable claims or dismiss the complaint, or any portion of the complaint, if the complaint—

COMPLAINTS' DEFICIENCIES

Complaints:

(a) appear to be supplemented piecemeal with letters and exhibits--filed after complaints--possibly referring to other potential defendants and claims. (ECF Nos. 17-18.)

(b) do not appear to recognize Defendants' failure to follow promises or jail policy does not necessarily equal federal constitutional violations.

(c) apparently inappropriately allege civil-rights violations on basis of denied grievances.

(d) possibly inappropriately allege constitutional right to grievance process. *Boyd v. Werholtz*, 443 F. App'x 331, 332 (10th Cir. 2011) (unpublished) (“[T]here is no independent constitutional right to state administrative grievance procedures. Nor does the state’s voluntary provision of administrative grievance process create a liberty interest in that process.”).

(e) do not name possible individual defendants in the Complaint's caption, as needed.

(f) possibly assert constitutional violations--e.g., rude or insulting language--resulting in injuries that appear to be prohibited by 42 U.S.C.S. § 1997e(e) (2022), reading, "No Federal civil action may be brought by a prisoner . . . for mental or emotional injury suffered while in custody without a prior showing of a physical injury or the commission of a sexual act."

(g) need clarification regarding libel and slander causes of action, which are defined in Utah statute as follows:

(1) “Libel” means a malicious defamation, expressed either by printing or by signs or pictures or the like, tending to blacken the memory of one who is dead, or to impeach the honesty, integrity, virtue or reputation, or publish the natural defects of one who is alive, and thereby to expose him to public hatred, contempt or ridicule.

(2) “Slander” means any libel communicated by spoken words.

Utah Code Ann. 45-2-2 (2022).

(h) do not appear to state proper legal-access claim. (See below.)

(i) by naming Davis County as a defendant, try to state § 1983 claims in violation of municipal-liability doctrine. (See below.)

(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.S. § 1915A (2022).

(j) assert claims possibly invalidated by the rule in *Heck*. (See below.)

GUIDANCE FOR PLAINTIFF

Rule 8 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure requires a complaint to contain "(1) a short and plain statement of the grounds for the court's jurisdiction . . . ; (2) a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief; and (3) a demand for the relief sought." Rule 8's requirements mean to guarantee that defendants receive "fair notice of what the claim is and the grounds upon which it rests." *Stanko v. Davis*, 297 F. App'x 746, 748 (10th Cir. 2008) (unpublished) (quoting *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007)).

Pro se litigants are not excused from meeting these minimal pleading demands. "This is so because a pro se plaintiff requires no special legal training to recount the facts surrounding his alleged injury, and he must provide such facts if the court is to determine whether he makes out a claim on which relief can be granted." *Hall v. Bellmon*, 935 F.2d 1106, 1110 (10th Cir. 1991). Moreover, it is improper for the Court "to assume the role of advocate for a pro se litigant." *Id.* Thus, the Court cannot "supply additional facts, [or] construct a legal theory for plaintiff that assumes facts that have not been pleaded." *Dunn v. White*, 880 F.2d 1188, 1197 (10th Cir. 1989).

Plaintiff should consider these general points before filing an amended complaint:

(1) The revised complaint must stand entirely on its own and shall not refer to, or incorporate by reference, any portion of the original complaint. *See Murray v. Archambo*, 132 F.3d 609, 612 (10th Cir. 1998) (stating amended complaint supersedes original). The amended complaint may also not be added to after it is filed without moving for amendment.³

³ The rule on amending a pleading reads:
(a) Amendments Before Trial.

(2) The complaint must clearly state what each defendant--typically, a named government employee--did to violate Plaintiff's civil rights. *See Bennett v. Passic*, 545 F.2d 1260, 1262-63 (10th Cir. 1976) (stating personal participation of each named defendant is essential allegation in civil-rights action). "To state a claim, a complaint must 'make clear exactly *who* is alleged to have done *what* to *whom*.'" *Stone v. Albert*, 338 F. App'x 757, 759 (10th Cir. 2009) (unpublished) (emphasis in original) (quoting *Robbins v. Oklahoma*, 519 F.3d 1242, 1250 (10th Cir. 2008)). Plaintiff should also include, as much as possible, specific dates or at least estimates of when alleged constitutional violations occurred.

(3) Each cause of action, together with the facts and citations that directly support it, should be stated separately. Plaintiff should be as brief as possible while still using enough words to fully explain the "who," "what," "where," "when," and "why" of each claim. *Robbins*, 519 F.3d at 1248 ("The [*Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*] Court was particularly critical of complaints that 'mentioned no specific, time, place, or person involved in the alleged [claim].' [550 U.S. 544, 565] n.10 (2007). Given such a complaint, 'a defendant seeking to respond to plaintiff's conclusory allegations . . . would have little idea where to begin.' *Id.*").

(1) Amending as a Matter of Course. A party may amend its pleading once as a matter of course within:

- (A) 21 days after serving it, or
- (B) if the pleading is one to which a responsive pleading is required, 21 days after service of a responsive pleading or 21 days after service of a motion under Rule 12(b), (e), or (f), whichever is earlier.

(2) Other Amendments. In all other cases, a party may amend its pleadings only with the opposing party's written consent or the court's leave. The court should freely give leave when justice so requires.

(4) Plaintiff may not name an individual as a defendant based solely on his or her supervisory position. *See Mitchell v. Maynard*, 80 F.2d 1433, 1441 (10th Cir. 1996) (stating supervisory status alone does not support § 1983 liability).

(5) Grievance denial alone with no connection to “violation of constitutional rights alleged by plaintiff, does not establish personal participation under § 1983.” *Gallagher v. Shelton*, 587 F.3d 1063, 1069 (10th Cir. 2009).

(6) “No action shall be brought with respect to prison conditions under . . . Federal law, by a prisoner confined in any jail, prison, or other correctional facility until such administrative remedies as are available are exhausted.” 42 U.S.C.S. § 1997e(a) (2021). However, Plaintiff need not include grievance details in his complaint. Exhaustion of administrative remedies is an affirmative defense that must be raised by Defendants. *Jones v. Bock*, 549 U.S. 199, 216 (2007).

• Legal Access

The Court notes that Plaintiff's claim(s) may involve legal access. As Plaintiff fashions the amended complaint, Plaintiff should keep in mind that it is well-recognized that prison inmates "have a constitutional right to 'adequate, effective, and meaningful' access to the courts and that the states have 'affirmative obligations' to assure all inmates such access." *Ramos v. Lamm*, 639 F.2d 559, 583 (10th Cir. 1980). In *Bounds v. Smith*, 430 U.S. 817 (1977), the Supreme Court expounded on the obligation to provide legal access by stating "the fundamental constitutional right of access to the courts requires prison authorities to assist inmates in the preparation and filing of meaningful legal papers by providing prisoners with adequate law libraries or adequate assistance from persons trained in the law." *Id.* at 828 (footnote omitted & emphasis added).

However, to successfully assert a constitutional claim for denial of access to courts, a plaintiff must allege not only inadequacy of the library or legal assistance provided but also "that the denial of legal resources hindered [the plaintiff's] efforts to pursue a nonfrivolous claim." *Penrod v. Zavaras*, 84 F.3d 1399, 1403 (10th Cir. 1996) (emphasis added); *Carper v. Deland*, 54 F.3d 613, 616 (10th Cir. 1995). In other words, a plaintiff must show that "denial or delay of access to the court prejudiced h[er] in pursuing litigation." *Treff v. Galetka*, 74 F.3d 191, 194 (10th Cir. 1996). Moreover, the non-frivolous litigation involved must be "habeas corpus or civil rights actions regarding current confinement." *Carper*, 54 F.3d at 616; accord *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 353-55 (1996).

• **Local Government Liability**

To establish liability of local-government entities, such as Davis County, under § 1983, "a plaintiff must show (1) the existence of a municipal custom or policy and (2) a direct causal link between the custom or policy and the violation alleged." *Jenkins v. Wood*, 81 F.3d 988, 993-94 (10th Cir. 1996) (citing *City of Canton v. Harris*, 489 U.S. 378, 385 (1989)). Local governmental entities may not be held liable under § 1983 based on the doctrine of *respondeat superior*. See *Cannon v. City and County of Denver*, 998 F.2d 867, 877 (10th Cir. 1993); see also *Monell v. Dep't of Soc. Servs. of N.Y.*, 436 U.S. 658, 694 (1978).

Plaintiff has not so far established a direct causal link between his alleged injuries and any custom or policy of Davis County. Thus, the Court concludes that Plaintiff's complaint, as it stands, fails to state claims against Davis County.

• *Heck*

Plaintiff's claims appear to include some allegations that if true may invalidate his conviction or sentence. "In *Heck*, the Supreme Court explained that a § 1983 action that would impugn the validity of a plaintiff's [incarceration] cannot be maintained unless the [basis for incarceration] has been reversed on direct appeal or impaired by collateral proceedings." *Nichols v. Baer*, 315 F. App'x 738, 739 (10th Cir. 2009) (unpublished) (citing *Heck v. Humphrey*, 512 U.S. 477, 486-87 (1994)). *Heck* keeps litigants "from using a § 1983 action, with its more lenient pleading rules, to challenge their conviction or sentence without complying with the more stringent exhaustion requirements for habeas actions." *Butler v. Compton*, 482 F.3d 1277, 1279 (10th Cir. 2007) (citation omitted). *Heck* clarifies that "civil tort actions are not appropriate vehicles for challenging the validity of outstanding criminal judgments." 512 U.S. at 486.

Plaintiff argues that his constitutional rights were breached in a way that may attack Petitioner's very imprisonment. *Heck* requires that, if a plaintiff requests § 1983 damages, this Court must decide whether judgment for the plaintiff would unavoidably imply that Plaintiff's incarceration is invalid. *Id.* at 487. Here, it appears it may on some claims. If this Court were to conclude that Plaintiff's constitutional rights were violated in a prejudicial manner, it would be stating that Plaintiff's incarceration was not valid. Thus, the involved claims "must be dismissed unless the plaintiff can demonstrate that the conviction or sentence has already been invalidated." *Id.* This has possibly not happened and may result in dismissal of such claims.

ORDER

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that:

(1) Plaintiff must within thirty days cure the Amended Complaint's deficiencies noted above by filing a document entitled, "Second Amended Complaint," that does not refer to or include any other document. The Second Amended Complaint **MAY NOT** include claims outside or beyond what was already contained in the complaints originally filed here. This is the second and **FINAL** order allowing Plaintiff to cure deficiencies in his complaint. If a second amended complaint is filed, the Court will screen it for dismissal or service.

(2) The Clerk's Office shall mail Plaintiff the Pro Se Litigant Guide with a blank-form civil-rights complaint which Plaintiff must use if he wishes to pursue another amended complaint.

(3) If Plaintiff fails to timely cure the above deficiencies according to this Order's instructions, this action will be dismissed without further notice.

(4) Plaintiff must tell the Court of any address change and timely comply with Court orders. *See* D. Utah Civ. R. 83-1.3(e) ("In all cases, counsel and parties appearing *pro se* must notify the clerk's office immediately of any change in address, email address, or telephone number."). Failure to do so may result in this action's dismissal for failure to prosecute. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 41(b) ("If the plaintiff fails to prosecute or to comply with these rules or a court order, a defendant may move to dismiss the action or any claim against it. Unless the dismissal order states otherwise, a dismissal under this subdivision (b) and any dismissal not under this rule--except one for lack of jurisdiction, improper venue, or failure to join a party under Rule 19--operates as an adjudication on the merits.").

(5) Time extensions are disfavored, though reasonable extensions may be granted. Any motion for time extension must be filed no later than **fourteen days** before the deadline to be extended.

(6) No direct communication is to take place with any judge. All relevant information, letters, documents, and papers, labeled with case number, are to be directed to the Clerk of Court.

(7) Plaintiff's motion for service of process is **DENIED**. (ECF No. 15.) There is no valid complaint on file as of this Order. Further, no further motion for service of process is needed here. *See* 28 U.S.C.S. § 1915(d) (2022) ("The officers of the court shall issue and serve all process, and perform all duties in [*in forma pauperis*] cases."). Instead, on its own, the Court will perform its screening function and determine itself whether the amended complaint warrants service.

(8) Plaintiff's motions for the Court to request missing transcripts from the Utah Court of Appeals and appoint a civil investigator are **DENIED**. (ECF Nos. 19, 24.) As there is no valid complaint on file (as of this Order), discovery requests are premature.

(9) The Court will not accept any filings from Plaintiff except for a second amended complaint until further filings are specifically invited by the Court. The Clerk's Office is ordered to return to sender any attempted filing except for a second amended complaint until further notice by the Court. Any other filings would be irrelevant and distracting at this stage of the litigation.

DATED this 20th day of July, 2022.

BY THE COURT:



JUDGE DAVID BARLOW
United States District Court