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IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA
ROANOKE DIVISION

| | | |
|----------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| JOSHUA WAYNE PHELPS, |) | Civil Action No. 7:10-cv-00365 |
| Plaintiff, |) | |
| |) | |
| v. |) | <u>MEMORANDUM OPINION</u> |
| |) | |
| BRRJA, |) | By: Hon. Jackson L. Kiser |
| Defendant. |) | Senior United States District Judge |

Joshua Wayne Phelps, a Virginia inmate proceeding pro se, filed a civil rights action, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 with jurisdiction vested in 28 U.S.C. § 1343. Plaintiff names the Blue Ridge Regional Jail Authority (“BRRJA”) as the sole defendant. Plaintiff alleges that the BRRJA’s officers used excessive force against him. This matter is before me for screening, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915A. After reviewing plaintiff’s submissions, I dismiss the complaint without prejudice for failing to state a claim upon which relief may be granted.

I.

Plaintiff alleges the following facts in his complaint. Plaintiff flooded his cell on April 18, 2010. Six correctional officers arrived at his cell and placed him in restraints. The officers removed plaintiff from his cell and shoved him into every door while walking to intake. Once at intake, the correctional officers allegedly kicked him to the ground beyond the sight of the cameras and repeatedly kicked and punched him in the face and ribs. He alleges the officers cracked his ribs and bruised his eyes. Plaintiff requests a transfer from the BRRJA’s facility to a Virginia Department of Corrections facility.

II.

I must dismiss any action or claim filed by an inmate if I determine that the action or claim is frivolous or fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted. See 28 U.S.C.

§§ 1915(e)(2), 1915A(b)(1); 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The first standard includes claims based upon “an indisputably meritless legal theory,” “claims of infringement of a legal interest which clearly does not exist,” or claims where the “factual contentions are clearly baseless.” Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 327 (1989). The second standard is the familiar standard for a motion to dismiss under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6), accepting the plaintiff’s factual allegations as true. A complaint needs “a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief” and sufficient “[f]actual allegations . . . to raise a right to relief above the speculative level” Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007) (internal quotation marks omitted). A plaintiff’s basis for relief “requires more than labels and conclusions” Id. Therefore, the plaintiff must “allege facts sufficient to state all the elements of [the] claim.” Bass v. E.I. Dupont de Nemours & Co., 324 F.3d 761, 765 (4th Cir. 2003).

However, determining whether a complaint states a plausible claim for relief is “a context-specific task that requires the reviewing court to draw on its judicial experience and common sense.” Ashcroft v. Iqbal, ___ U.S. ___, 129 S. Ct. 1937, 1950 (May 18, 2009). Thus, a court screening a complaint under Rule 12(b)(6) can identify pleadings that are not entitled to an assumption of truth because they consist of no more than labels and conclusions. Id. Although I liberally construe pro se complaints, Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520-21 (1972), I do not act as the inmate’s advocate, sua sponte developing statutory and constitutional claims the inmate failed to clearly raise on the face of his complaint. See Brock v. Carroll, 107 F.3d 241, 243 (4th Cir. 1997) (Luttig, J., concurring); Beaudett v. City of Hampton, 775 F.2d 1274, 1278 (4th Cir. 1985). See also Gordon v. Leeke, 574 F.2d 1147, 1151 (4th Cir. 1978) (recognizing that district

courts are not expected to assume the role of advocate for the pro se plaintiff).

To state a claim under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege “the violation of a right secured by the Constitution and laws of the United States, and must show that the alleged deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law.” West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988). “Local governing bodies . . . can be sued directly under § 1983 for monetary, declaratory, or injunctive relief where . . . the action that is alleged to be unconstitutional implements or executes a policy statement, ordinance, regulation, or decision officially adopted and promulgated by that body's officers.” Monell v. New York City Dept. of Social Services, 436 U.S. 658, 690 (1978). Thus, a governmental entity is liable under § 1983 only when the entity itself is a “moving force” behind the deprivation. Polk County v. Dodson, 454 U.S. 312, 326 (1981). Thus, the entity's official policy must have played a part in the alleged violation of federal law. Oklahoma City v. Tuttle, 471 U.S. 808, 817-818 (1985). However, plaintiff fails to link a BRRJA policy to any of the correctional officers’ alleged acts. Accordingly, plaintiff fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, and I dismiss the complaint without prejudice.

III.

For the foregoing reasons, I dismiss the complaint without prejudice for failing to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b)(1).

The Clerk is directed to send copies of this memorandum opinion and the accompanying order to the plaintiff.

ENTER: This 19th day of August, 2010.


Senior United States District Judge