

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Martinez v. Napa State Hospital

Martinez · No. 23-cv-04247-SI · Decided February 26, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of California grants the California Department of State Hospitals’ motion to dismiss claims arising from an assault on plaintiff while involuntarily committed at Napa State Hospital. The court holds that statutory immunity under California Government Code section 854.8 applies because the statutes and regulations cited by plaintiff do not satisfy the specific minimum-standard exception in section 855. The court dismisses Claims 5, 7, and 8 against the Department with prejudice, dismisses the Department as a defendant, and allows the remaining claims against individual defendants to proceed.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Susan Illston
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
DECIDED	February 26, 2025
DOCKET	23-cv-04247-SI
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendant Department of State Hospitals moved under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6) to dismiss the three state-law claims asserted against it in the Second Amended Complaint, arguing statutory immunity and failure to state a valid claim.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	On a Rule 12(b)(6) motion, the court accepts well-pleaded factual allegations as true, draws reasonable inferences in the plaintiff’s favor, and dismisses when the complaint fails to allege enough facts to state a facially plausible claim for relief. Conclusory allegations, unwarranted factual deductions, and unreasonable inferences need not be accepted as true.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown

PARTIES

Marcella Elizabeth Martinez v. Napa State Hospital, Department of State Hospitals

TOPICS

motions to dismiss

statutory interpretation

health law

negligence

premises liability

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

governmental immunity

health law

negligence

premises liability

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the Department of State Hospitals was immune under California Government Code section 854.8 from Martinez's state-law negligence, vicarious-liability, and premises-liability claims.
2. Whether Penal Code section 4002 applies to the placement and housing of patients in state mental hospitals and therefore supplies an exception to the immunity provided by Government Code section 854.8.
3. Whether title 22, California Code of Regulations, sections 71115 and 71619 prescribe specific minimum standards within the meaning of Government Code section 855 such that their alleged violation defeats statutory immunity.
4. Whether the Doe defendants should remain in the action while plaintiff identifies them through discovery.

HOLDINGS

1. The Department of State Hospitals retained statutory immunity because Martinez did not plausibly allege an injury proximately caused by the failure to provide equipment, personnel, or facilities required by a statute or regulation prescribing specific minimum standards under Government Code section 855.
2. Penal Code section 4002 does not apply to the placement and housing of patients in state mental hospitals and therefore cannot defeat the Department of State Hospitals' immunity.
3. Section 71115 does not defeat immunity because its only ongoing obligation is to maintain the hospital in a safe structural condition, and the hospital's structural condition did not proximately cause Martinez's injury.
4. Section 71619 does not defeat immunity because its requirement that a method of assuring patient privacy be maintained is a broad goal, not a specific minimum standard prescribing the manner of compliance.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“In conclusion, DSH retains statutory immunity under Government Code section 854.8 since plaintiff has failed to plausibly allege, as required by section 855, that her injury was “proximately caused by the failure of the public entity to provide adequate or sufficient equipment, personnel or facilities required by any statute or any regulation . . . prescribing minimum standards for equipment, personnel or facilities.”” (Discussion I.D)

“For the foregoing reasons, the Court GRANTS DSH’s motion to dismiss with prejudice Claims 5, 7, and 8 against DSH.” (Conclusion)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Martinez was an involuntarily committed patient at Napa State Hospital beginning February 24, 2020. She shared a room and bathroom facilities with another patient, Lynnsey Eva Karla Braun, who allegedly made sexual and romantic advances toward Martinez and harassed her after she rejected them. Martinez complained to her treatment team, was moved to an adjacent bedroom, and was later attacked by Braun in a hallway bedroom with a deadly weapon, suffering extensive head lacerations.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Martinez initially sued in Napa County Superior Court in 2020, and defendants removed the action to federal court. After a prior federal action and a later separate suit, the court granted in part and denied in part defendants' motion for judgment on the pleadings, permitted amendment, and plaintiff filed a Second Amended Complaint. The Department of State Hospitals then moved to dismiss Claims 5, 7, and 8; the court granted the motion with prejudice and allowed the claims against the individual defendants to proceed.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Martinez v. Napa State Hosp., Case No. 20-cv-08631
- Twombly, 550 U.S. at 570
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009)
- Usher v. City of Los Angeles, 828 F.2d 556, 561 (9th Cir. 1987)
- In re Gilead Sciences Securities Litigation, 536 F.3d 1049, 1055 (9th Cir. 2008)
- Lockhart v. County of Los Angeles, 66 Cal. Rptr. 3d 62, 76-77 (Cal. Ct. App. 2007)
- Brackin v. City and County of San Francisco, 2016 WL 3185021, at *7-*8 (N.D. Cal. June 8, 2016)
- People v. White, 2 Cal. Rptr. 202, 203 (Cal. Ct. App. 1960)
- Jiminez v. County of Santa Cruz, 116 Cal. Rptr. 878, 879 (Cal. Ct. App. 1974)
- Davis v. Michigan Department of Treasury, 489 U.S. 803, 809 (1989)
- Poole v. Orange County Fire Authority, 354 P.3d 346, 350 (Cal. 2015)
- Spath v. County of Santa Clara, 2023 WL 4411961, at *6 (N.D. Cal. July 7, 2023)
- Gillespie v. Civiletti, 629 F.2d 637, 642 (9th Cir. 1980)
- Wiltsie v. California Department of Corrections, 406 F.2d 515, 518 (9th Cir. 1968)
- Velasquez v. Senko, 643 F. Supp. 1172, 1180 (N.D. Cal. 1986)

