

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA**

Powelson v. Sausalito Police Department

No. 23-cv-01360-EMC (SK) (N.D. Cal. Aug. 6, 2025) · No. 23-cv-01360-EMC (SK) · Decided August 6, 2025

SUMMARY

The court denied Plaintiff Robbie Powelson’s request to subpoena the Marin County District Attorney’s Office for records concerning Officer Nick White’s alleged inclusion on a Brady list. The court found the requested information unrelated to Powelson’s 42 U.S.C. § 1983 claims arising from a 2021 encampment incident and concluded that evidence of alleged prior wrongdoing could not be used to prove character under Federal Rule of Evidence 404(b).

OPINION

Powelson v. Sausalito Police Department

PER CURIAM.

1 2 3

4 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

5 NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

6 7 ROBBIE POWELSON, Case No. 23-cv-01360-EMC (SK) 8 Plaintiff,

ORDER DENYING ISSUANCE OF

9 v. SUBPEONA

10 SAUSALITO POLICE DEPARTMENT, et

al., Regarding Docket No. 89 11 Defendants. 12 13 Plaintiff seeks to issue a subpoena to the Marin County District Attorney’s Office for 14 information regarding Defendant Officer Nick White’s alleged inclusion on a “Brady list” 15 identifying him as having credibility issues. Plaintiff claims that White’s inclusion on the list 16 stems from White allegedly committing perjury in a criminal trial against his ex-girlfriend. 17 Plaintiff argues that this information is relevant to White’s credibility as a witness in this action. 18 A. Background 19 Plaintiff obtained a letter, dated July 12, 2016, addressed to White, from the Marin County 20 District Attorney’s Office. That letter states in pertinent part: 21 Our office is required by law to disclose to a defendant and/or his/her attorney of 22 record any information we have in our possession concerning a witness who is on probation and/or which may possibly fall within the scope of Brady v. Maryland 23 (1963) 373 U.S. 821, and/or People v. Coyer (1983) 142 Cal.App.3d 9392, and the provisions of [California] Penal Code Section 1054. 24 As we have previously discussed, the Marin County District Attorney’s Office’s 25 Brady Committee has met and made a determination that Mill Valley Police 26 Department report numbers 13-860 and 16-93 contain

information that must be 27 provided in future cases in which you are a witness. . . . 1 (Dkt. No. 89 (Ex. A).) 2 California Penal Code section 1054 provides: 3 4 This chapter shall be interpreted to give effect to all of the following purposes: 5 (a) To promote the ascertainment of truth in trials by requiring timely pretrial discovery. 6 (b) To save court time by requiring that discovery be conducted informally between and among the parties before judicial enforcement is requested. 7 (c) To save court time in trial and avoid the necessity for frequent interruptions and 8 postponements. (d) To protect victims and witnesses from danger, harassment, and undue delay of 9 the proceedings. (e) To provide that no discovery shall occur in criminal cases except as provided by 10 this chapter, other express statutory provisions, or as mandated by the Constitution of the United States. 11 12 Cal. Pen. Code § 1054. Plaintiff also attaches an article, originally published on March 28, 2017, about a trial in 13 which White accused his ex-girlfriend of misdemeanor corporal injury on a dating partner in 14 January 2016. (Dkt. No. 89 (Ex. B).) The article states that the jury acquitted the defendant and 15 that at least one juror found that White was not credible. (Id.) 16 B. Analysis 17 Defendants argue that Plaintiff’s request is overbroad and disproportionate to the needs of 18 the case because the request seeks all documents related to Brady determinations without 19 “temporal or subject-matter limits.” Defendants also argue that California law protects these 20 documents and that federal courts apply a balancing test to requests for information concerning 21 police disciplinary records. See, e.g., *Kelly v. City of San Jose*, 114 F.R.D. 653, 663-68 (N.D. Cal. 22 1987). 23 Plaintiff seems to believe that he can use information about White’s alleged lies during 24 trial arising out of a domestic violence incident in 2016 to show that White lacks credibility in this 25 case. However, Plaintiff cannot use information at trial from a previous unrelated disciplinary 26 action involving White, if one exists, to show that White is lying on the stand in this case. 27 1 involving an allegation of lies is not one of those ways. Federal Rule of Evidence 404(b) provides 2 that evidence “of any other crime, wrong, or act is not admissible to prove a person’s character in 3 order to show that on a particular occasion the person acted in accordance with the character.” 4 Fed. R. Evid. 404(b). There is an exception to prove “motive, opportunity, intent, preparation, 5 plan, knowledge, identity, absence of mistake, or lack of accident.” Fed. R. Evid. 404(b)(2). 6 Here, Plaintiff fails to satisfy any exception. 7 Courts have held that evidence of a defendant’s wrongdoing unrelated to the case at hand 8 is not subject to discovery. See, e.g., *Brownlee v. Burnes*, 2024 WL 4957495, at *2-3 (E.D. Cal.

9 Dec. 3, 2024) (finding requested records irrelevant, overbroad, overly burdensome, and not 10 proportional to the needs of this case where plaintiff did not limit the request based on time frame, 11 nature of the grievance allegations, or the outcome of the grievance); see also *Mueller v. Walker*, 12 124 F.R.D. 654, 658 (D. Or. 1989) (denying discovery in excessive force case “as to violations of 13 regulations or procedures unrelated to incidents of violence or complaints of police brutality”). 14 Here, Plaintiff alleges that White lied on the stand in a case involving an alleged domestic 15 violence incident with his ex-girlfriend. In this suit, Plaintiff alleges claims

under 42 U.S.C. § 16 1983 against White based on actions taken on November 22, 2021 for unlawful seizure, false 17 arrest, violation of due process, and First Amendment retaliation arising out of White's and other 18 officers' actions in removing Plaintiff's belongings from an encampment.³ (Dkt. No. 40.) These 19 incidents are completely unrelated. 20 The scope of disclosure under Brady and Coyer is very different from the scope of 21 discovery in civil cases. Brady stands for the proposition that the due process clause of the United 22 States Constitution requires the prosecution to disclose exculpatory material to a criminal 23 defendant. 373 U.S. at 86. Coyer stands for the proposition that "a defendant is entitled to 24 discovery of criminal charges currently pending against prosecution witnesses anywhere in the 25 state." 142 Cal.App.3d at 842. These cases relate to the rights of criminal defendants. They do 26 27 3 It is not entirely clear which claims against White survived the order granting in part and 1 not bear on the situation at bar—a civil plaintiffs request for discovery. 2 For these reasons, the Court DENIES Plaintiff's request. 3 IT IS SO ORDERED. 4 Dated: August 6, 2025 4 (la, . 5 SALLIE KIM

6 United States Magistrate Judge 7 8 9 10 11 a 12 15 16 it 4 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28