

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF RHODE ISLAND

Rivas Mendizabal v. Faria Meat Market LLC

No. 26-cv-062-JJM-AEM (D.R.I. Apr. 9, 2026) · No. No. 26-cv-062-JJM-AEM · Decided April 13, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island denied Faria Meat Market LLC’s motion to dismiss claims alleging unpaid overtime under the FLSA, RIPWA, and RIMWA. The court also allowed the plaintiff’s hostile work environment and retaliation claims based on alleged sexual harassment, physical assaults, and termination after complaints. The court concluded that the pleadings plausibly alleged willful wage violations and that the continuing violation doctrine defeated the timeliness arguments.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island
WRITING FOR THE COURT	John J. McConnell, Jr.
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island
DECIDED	April 13, 2026
DOCKET	No. 26-cv-062-JJM-AEM
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff brought claims under the Rhode Island Civil Rights Act, Rhode Island Payment of Wages Act, Rhode Island Minimum Wage Act, and Fair Labor Standards Act. Defendant moved to dismiss under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6), and the court treated the motion as one for judgment on the pleadings under Rule 12(c) because the answer had been filed.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	On a Rule 12(b)(6) or Rule 12(c) motion, the court accepts well-pleaded facts as true, draws reasonable inferences for the plaintiff, and asks whether the complaint states a plausible claim for relief. The Rule 12(c) standard is the same as the Rule 12(b)(6) standard.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished
PARTIES	Carmen Rivas Mendizabal v. Faria Meat Market LLC

TOPICS

flsa

wage and hour

hostile work environment

retaliation

motions to dismiss

PRACTICE AREAS

employment law

wage and hour

civil rights

civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the complaint plausibly alleged an FLSA overtime violation and facts supporting application of the three-year limitations period for willful violations.
2. Whether the Rhode Island Payment of Wages Act claim was preempted by the FLSA because both claims arose from the same alleged unpaid overtime.
3. Whether the Rhode Island Minimum Wage Act provides a private right of action for unpaid overtime claims.
4. Whether the alleged sexual harassment and physical assaults plausibly stated a hostile-work-environment claim and could be considered under the continuing-violation doctrine.
5. Whether the alleged complaints followed by termination plausibly stated a retaliation claim and allowed application of the continuing-violation doctrine.

HOLDINGS

1. The complaint plausibly alleged that Mendizabal worked more than 40 hours per week without receiving the required overtime premium and that Faria Market knew or should have known of the work.
2. The allegations plausibly supported application of the FLSA's three-year limitations period because willfulness was genuinely disputed and could not appropriately be resolved on the pleadings.
3. The FLSA did not preempt the Rhode Island Payment of Wages Act claim merely because both claims arose from the same alleged failure to pay overtime.
4. The Rhode Island Minimum Wage Act provides a private right of action, so Mendizabal's claim for unpaid overtime under that statute could proceed.
5. The allegations of repeated unwelcome sexual touching, physical slamming, hair pulling, attempted suffocation, and injury from a door were sufficient to state a hostile-work-environment claim at the pleading stage.
6. The continuing-violation doctrine allowed the court to consider component acts of the alleged hostile work environment, including acts outside the limitations period, because related conduct allegedly continued through the plaintiff's termination.
7. The complaint plausibly stated a retaliation claim based on Mendizabal's complaints about assault and harassment followed shortly by her termination.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“To survive a motion to dismiss under Rule 12(b)(6), Ms. Mendizabal must lay out a “plausible claim.””

“The mere fact that both claims arise from the same alleged unpaid wages does not render them legally indistinguishable, nor does it furnish a basis for preemption.”

“There is a private right of action for violation of the RIMWA.”

“Given the frequency of the harassment and violent nature, the allegations state a claim based on a hostile work environment.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Mendizabal alleged that she worked approximately 66 to 72 hours per week as a cook for Faria Meat Market for about four years. Although she was paid for 40 hours at an hourly rate, the employer allegedly paid a flat \$100 cash amount for all overtime hours, resulting in unpaid overtime premiums. She also alleged repeated sexual harassment and physical assaults by a coworker related to the owners, reported the conduct to management and law enforcement, and was terminated shortly afterward.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Mendizabal sued her former employer alleging unpaid overtime, sexual harassment, physical assault, and retaliation culminating in termination. Faria Meat Market moved to dismiss. The district court denied the motion as to the pleaded wage-and-hour, hostile-work-environment, and retaliation claims.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- 556 U.S. 662, 678-79 (2009)
- 496 F.3d 1, 5 (1st Cir. 2007)
- 175 F.3d 75, 77 (1st Cir. 1999)
- 491 F.3d 1, 5 (1st Cir. 2007)
- 814 F.3d 1, 2 (1st Cir. 2016)
- 725 F.3d 34, 43-44 (1st Cir. 2013)
- 486 U.S. 128, 133 (1988)
- 552 F. Supp. 3d 249, 259 (D.R.I. 2021)
- 641 F.2d 45, 46 (1st Cir. 1981)
- No. CV 15-342ML, 2016 WL 11652882, at *10 (D.R.I. Feb. 29, 2016)
- 659 F.3d 64, 73 (1st Cir. 2011)
- 625 F.3d 22, 32 (1st Cir. 2010)
- 914 F.3d 52, 64 (1st Cir. 2019)
- 331 F.3d 207, 216 (1st Cir. 2003)
- 876 F.3d 1, 12 (1st Cir. 2017)

- 113 F.4th 86, 111 (1st Cir. 2024)
- 780 F.3d 52, 57 (1st Cir. 2015)
- 553 F.3d 121, 130 (1st Cir. 2009)
- No. CV 24-251 WES, 2025 WL 1687595, at *7 (D.R.I. June 16, 2025)
- 113 F.4th 25, 41-42 (1st Cir. 2024)
- 99 F.4th 105, 117 (1st Cir. 2024)

OPINION

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF RHODE ISLAND) RIVAS
MENDIZABAL,) Plaintiff,)) v.) No. 26-cv-062-JJM-AEM) FARIA MEAT MARKET LLC,)
Defendant.)) AMENDED MEMORANDUM AND ORDER JOHN J. MCCONNELL, JR.,
United States District Court Chief Judge. Carmen Rivas Mendizabal brings this suit against her former employer, Faria Meat Market, LLC (“Faria Market”), alleging she was subjected to ongoing wage theft, sexual harassment, physical assault in the workplace, and unlawful retaliation that led to her termination.

Her claims are brought under the Rhode Island Civil Rights Act (“RICRA”), the Rhode Island Payment of Wages Act (“RIPWA”), the Rhode Island Minimum Wage Act (“RIMWA”), and the Fair Labor Standards Act (“FLSA”). Faria Market has moved to dismiss under Rule 12(b)(6) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.

For the reasons stated below, the Court denies Faria Market’s motion. I. BACKGROUND Ms. Mendizabal was employed by Faria Market as a cook and alleges that she regularly worked more than 60 hours per week. ECF No. 1 ¶¶ 17-18. She alleges that, although Faria Market purported to pay her on an hourly basis, they compensated her for only 40 hours at a straight rate through direct deposit and paid a flat cash amount for all additional hours worked, regardless of the number of overtime hours.. ¶¶ 19-20.

She states that this compensation scheme functioned as a fixed salary and resulted in her receiving less than the legally required overtime premium.. ¶¶ 20, 22. According to the Complaint, despite an increase in her stated hourly rate during her employment, Faria Market maintained the same pay structure, causing her to be consistently underpaid for overtime over several years.. ¶ 21.

Ms. Mendizabal further alleges that she was subjected to repeated sexual harassment and physical assaults by a coworker who was related to Faria Market’s owners.. ¶ 25. She states that conduct included unwelcomed sexual harassment and physical assault, creating a hostile and abusive work environment.. ¶¶ 26-27. She alleges that she reported this conduct to Faria Market’s management and to law enforcement, but Faria Market failed to take appropriate remedial action.. ¶¶ 28- 30.

She further alleges that, shortly after making these complaints, Faria Market terminated her employment in retaliation.. ¶¶ 32-33. She states that Faria Market maintained policies and

practices that failed to comply with wage and hour laws, tolerated workplace harassment, and retaliated against employees who engaged in protected activity thereby causing her significant damages.. ¶¶ 36, 38- 40.

II. STANDARD OF REVIEW¹ To survive a motion to dismiss under Rule 12(b)(6), Ms. Mendizabal must lay out a “plausible claim.”, 556 U.S. 662, 679 (2009). In other words, she must plead “factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.”. at 678. Determining whether a complaint sets forth a plausible claim for relief is a “context-specific task that requires the reviewing court to draw on its judicial experience and common sense.”. at 679.

In evaluating a claim’s plausibility, the Court must “assume the truth of all well-pleaded facts and give the plaintiff the benefit of all reasonable inferences therefrom.”, 496 F.3d 1, 5 (1st Cir. 2007) (citing, 175 F.3d 75, 77 (1st Cir. 1999)). III. DISCUSSION A. Wage and Hour Law Claims Ms. Mendizabal alleges that Faria Market violated the FLSA, RIPWA, and RIMWA.

First, Faria Market argues that the FLSA claim fails to state a claim on its face and is barred by the applicable statute of limitations. Second, Faria Market argues, in the alternative, that the RIPWA claim is preempted by the FLSA, thereby 1 The Court agrees with Ms. Mendizabal’s argument that, because Faria Market filed its Answer with its Motion to Dismiss, the pleadings are closed, and the Motion is properly considered under Rule 12(c).

However, characterization as a Rule 12(b)(6) motion or a Rule 12(c) motion is substantively unimportant – “[t]he standard of review of a motion for judgment on the pleadings under [Rule] 12(c) is the same as that for a motion to dismiss under Rule 12(b)(6).”, 491 F.3d 1, 5 (1st Cir. 2007).

The federal rules explicitly allow a motion to dismiss for failure to state a claim to be raised in a Rule 12(c) motion. Rule 12(h)(2)(B). foreclosing relief under the corresponding state law. Lastly, they argue that the RIMWA claim must be dismissed because the statute does not provide a private right of action. 1. FLSA (Count I) Ms. Mendizabal states that Faria Market failed to pay her overtime premium for the hours worked more than 40 per week in violation of the FLSA, 29 U.S.C. § 207.

Specifically, she alleges she was paid a \$100 flat fee in cash per week for all overtime hours. Section 207(a)(1) of the FLSA “requires employers to compensate employees for each hour worked more than forty hours during a workweek ‘at a rate not less than one and one-half times the regular rate at which [they are] employed.’”, 814 F.3d 1, 2 (1st Cir. 2016) (quoting 29 U.S.C. § 207(a)(1)) (alteration in original).

To succeed on a claim for unpaid overtime wages, Plaintiffs must show that they were “employed ‘for a workweek longer than forty hours’ and that any hours worked more than forty per week

were not compensated ‘at a rate not less than one and one-half times the regular rate.’”, 725 F.3d 34, 43 (1st Cir. 2013) (quoting 29 U.S.C. § 207(a)(1)). Plaintiff must also show that the employer had actual or constructive knowledge of that work., 725 F.3d at 44.

Here, the Complaint alleges that Ms. Mendizabal worked approximately 66 to 72 hours per week and identifies her hourly rate, Faria Market’s alleged pay scheme, her estimated weekly overtime shortfall, and the relevant period.. ¶ 18. It further alleges that for about 4 years, Faria Market paid only 40 hours at her normal hourly rate and gave a flat \$100 cash payment for overtime, regardless of hours worked.. ¶¶ 20-24.

She also identifies her hourly rates over time and estimates weekly unpaid overtime.. The Complaint also alleges that Faria Market created and managed the payment system, overseeing both the direct deposit and weekly cash payments.. ¶¶ 20-22. These facts, taken in toto, are sufficient to establish a plausible inference of Faria Market’s knowledge. Furthermore, under the FLSA, an action for unpaid compensation must commence within two years after a cause of action accrues and three years if the cause of action arises out of a willful violation.

29 U.S.C. § 255(a). A violation is willful if “the employer either knew or showed reckless disregard for the matter of whether its conduct was prohibited by the [FLSA].”, 486 U.S. 128, 133 (1988). Faria Market denies that they knew or recklessly disregarded state of federal law. Ms. Mendizabal maintains that Faria Market carried out a deliberate multi- year scheme to disguise a fixed weekly salary as hourly pay specifically to avoid overtime obligations.

ECF No. 1 ¶¶ 22, 36-41. Willfulness is genuinely disputed and is more appropriately resolved on more fully developed factual records, typically available at summary judgment or trial., 552 F. Supp. 3d 249, 259 (D.R.I. 2021). Taken as a whole, those allegations supporting the FLSA claim are sufficient to survive a motion to dismiss and warrant application of the three-year statute of limitations.

2. FLSA Preemption (Count II) Ms. Mendizabal brings a claim under RIPWA, R.I. Gen. Laws § 28-14-1 et seq., alleging that Faria Market failed to properly compensate her for overtime wages. Faria Market argues that the RIPWA claim is preempted by FLSA because it relies on the same factual allegations — failure to pay proper overtime compensation. “The FLSA does not expressly prohibit state legislation in the area of wages and working conditions,”, 641 F.2d 45, 46 (1st Cir.

1981), nor does its plain text expressly preempt state-law claims seeking relief for minimum wage and overtime violations, 29 U.S.C. § 216(b).² The mere fact that both claims arise from the same alleged unpaid wages does not render them legally indistinguishable, nor does it furnish a basis for preemption. At the appropriate juncture, while Ms. Mendizabal may not obtain duplicative recovery for the same injury under both federal and state overtime statutes, they are nonetheless entitled to plead their claim in the alternative.

641 F.2d at 46. Faria Market's reliance on is unpersuasive., No. CV 15-342ML, 2016 WL 11652882, at *10 (D.R.I. 2 It also does not "implicitly prohibit state regulation by occupying the whole field and leaving no room for supplementary state provisions.", 641 F.2d at 46. Feb. 29, 2016). Accepting Faria Market's position would nullify Rhode Island's wage enforcement scheme for any worker who also holds federal overtime rights, a result that cannot be reconciled with the text of 29 U.S.C. § 218(a) or Congress's intent to permit states to provide protection above the federal floor.

Thus, the RIPWA claim should proceed. 3. RIMWA (Count III) Faria Market argues that Ms. Mendizabal cannot state a claim for overtime violations because R.I. Gen. Laws § 28-12-1 et seq. provides no private, independent cause of action for an aggrieved employee seeking overtime pay.

However, Ms. Mendizabal's Count III is premised on the Defendant's alleged failure to pay overtime wages under the Rhode Island Minimum Wage Act (R.I. Gen Laws § 28-12-1 et seq.). There is a private right of action for violation of the RIMWA. R.I. Gen. Laws § 28-14- 19.2 ("Any employee or former employee, or any organization representing the employee or former employee aggrieved by the failure to pay wages and/or benefits or misclassification in violation of chapter 12 of this title and/or this chapter may file a civil action in any court of competent jurisdiction to obtain relief.").

Faria Market motion to dismiss Count III is denied. B. Hostile Work Environment (Count IV) Ms. Mendizabal also claims that she was subject to a hostile work environment when she was subjected to unwelcome sexual harassment and physical assault by a male coworker. "To make out a prima facie case of a hostile work environment, [a plaintiff] must point to evidence showing, inter alia, that facts and circumstances of her employment viewed objectively were so 'severe,' 'pervasive,' and 'abusive' as to 'alter the conditions' of her job.", 659 F.3d 64, 73 (1st Cir.

2011) (quoting, 625 F.3d 22, 32 (1st Cir. 2010)). However, a "plaintiff need only show that her work environment was severe or that it was pervasive.", 914 F.3d 52, 64 (1st Cir. 2019). Courts consider several factors "including the frequency and severity of the discriminatory conduct, whether it was physically threatening or humiliating, and whether it unreasonably interfered with [the plaintiff's] work performance.", 331 F.3d 207, 216 (1st Cir.

2003). The "'accumulated effect' of behaviors that individually fall short may, taken together, constitute a hostile work environment.", 876 F.3d 1, 12 (1st Cir. 2017). Further, the Court is conscious of its role at this stage of the proceedings. "At the motion to dismiss phase in particular, subject to some policing at the outer bounds, the issue of whether harassment was severe or pervasive is commonly one of degree—both as to severity and pervasiveness—to be resolved by the trier of fact.", 113 F.4th 86, 111 (1st Cir.

2024) (quotation omitted). Ms. Mendizabal sufficiently alleges that a coworker who was related to Faria Market subjected her to a hostile work environment by: (a) inappropriate touching without consent; (b) physically slamming her against a wall; (c) pulling her by the hair; (d) attempting to suffocate her; and (e) closing a door on her hand, causing physical injury.

ECF No. 1 ¶ 26. Given the frequency of the harassment and violent nature, the allegations state a claim based on a hostile work environment. Furthermore, Faria Market's timeliness argument is likewise unpersuasive. Under the continuing violation doctrine, a plaintiff may recover for otherwise time barred acts of discrimination "so long as a related act fell within the limitations period.", 780 F.3d 52, 57 (1st Cir.

2015). A hostile work environment is a "classic example of a continuing violation" because the actionable wrong consists of an accumulation of "individual acts that, taken together, create the environment.", 553 F.3d 121, 130 (1st Cir. 2009).

Thus, all the "component acts" alleged in a hostile work environment claim may be considered in determining liability, even if some occurred outside the limitations period.. Here, Ms. Mendizabal stated she was subjected to abusive working conditions throughout her employment. While some of the alleged acts began outside the limitations period, she alleges that they culminated in her termination, which occurred in May 2023.

As already explained, Ms. Mendizabal has sufficiently alleged that her termination was connected to the prior sexual harassment and physical assault. Thus, she has sufficiently alleged a severe and pervasive hostile work environment, and the continuing violation doctrine applies. C. Retaliation Claim (Count V) To state a prima facie case of retaliation, Ms. Mendizabal must allege that "(1) [she] engaged in protected activity, (2) [she] suffered some materially adverse action, and (3) the adverse action was causally linked to her protected activity.", No. CV 24-251 WES, 2025 WL 1687595, at *7 (D.R.I.

June 16, 2025) (quoting, 113 F.4th 25, 41–42 (1st Cir. 2024). In addition, a termination constitutes an adverse employment action., 99 F.4th 105, 117 (1st Cir. 2024). Further, temporal proximity between the protected conduct and the adverse employment action "is sufficient to meet the relatively light burden of establishing a prima facie case of retaliation.". (cleaned up).

Ms. Mendizabal's factual allegations sufficiently support a claim for retaliation. On or around May 2023, she complained to Faria Market's management about the assaults and harassment and reported it to the police concerning the same issues. ECF No. ¶ 47. She further states that shortly thereafter her employment was terminated.. At this stage, these allegations state a claim based on a hostile work environment.

As with the hostile work environment claim, the statute of limitations argument fails. Ms. Mendizabal retaliation claim encompasses alleged acts of harassment throughout her employment,

which she plausibly connects to her termination in May 2023.

Thus, the continuing violation doctrine applies. IV. CONCLUSION For all these reasons, the Court DENIES Defendant Faria Meat Market LLC's Motion to Dismiss (ECF No. 8). IT IS SO ORDERED. _____ John J. McConnell, Jr. Chief Judge United States District Court April 9, 2026