

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE MIDDLE DISTRICT OF
PENNSYLVANIA

Ruben C. Holton v. United States

Holton · No. 4:22-CV-00070 · Decided March 2, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania adopted a magistrate judge’s report and recommendation and granted the United States’ motion for summary judgment. The court concluded that Holton failed to provide expert evidence supporting his professional negligence claim and failed to provide evidence sufficient to support his ordinary negligence claims concerning lingering COVID-19 symptoms allegedly arising from his incarceration at FCI Schuylkill.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Joseph F. Saporito, Jr.
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Middle District of Pennsylvania
DECIDED	March 2, 2026
DOCKET	4:22-CV-00070
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The district court reviewed a magistrate judge's report and recommendation recommending that the United States's motion for summary judgment be granted. No timely objections were filed, and the district court independently reviewed the report and record before adopting the recommendation.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Because no timely objections were filed, the plaintiff forfeited de novo review. The district court independently reviewed the report and record and applied clear-error review to the uncontested portions, giving reasoned consideration to the report and recommendation.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown; district court order adopting a report and recommendation

TOPICS

- summary judgment
- medical malpractice
- professional negligence
- negligence
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the report and recommendation recommending summary judgment for the United States should be adopted where the plaintiff filed no timely objections.
2. Whether the plaintiff could proceed on a professional-negligence claim without supporting expert testimony.
3. Whether the plaintiff produced sufficient evidence to create a genuine issue of material fact on his ordinary-negligence claims.

HOLDINGS

1. The plaintiff's failure to file timely objections forfeited de novo review, and the court reviewed the uncontested portions of the report and recommendation for clear error while giving them reasoned consideration.
2. Summary judgment was proper on the plaintiff's professional-negligence or medical-malpractice claim because he failed to provide supporting expert testimony or other expert evidence necessary to create a genuine issue of material fact.
3. Summary judgment was proper on the plaintiff's ordinary-negligence claims because he produced no evidence showing refused or delayed medical treatment, flawed treatment, or another government act supporting liability.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Holton was required to produce his own supporting expert testimony. His failure to do so precludes him from succeeding on his medical negligence claim” (Doc. 63 at 30)

“Holton has not offered any expert evidence to create a genuine issue of fact concerning his professional negligence claim [] and no reasonable factfinder could find that the United States committed medical malpractice based on the existing record” (Doc. 63 at 36)

“Nothing in the record evinces any refusal to administer, or delays in administering[,] medical treatment, and Holton does not identify any evidence corroborating his claim. Nor does he explain, through evidence or otherwise, how the treatment he received was flawed or delayed...” (Doc. 63 at 43)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Ruben C. Holton alleged that he contracted COVID-19 and suffered lingering and permanent symptoms and pain of mind while housed at FCI Schuylkill. The record indicated that prison medical staff consistently treated his complaints. The government submitted expert evidence supporting summary judgment, while Holton did not provide supporting expert testimony for his professional-negligence claim or evidence showing that the government breached a duty through delayed, refused, or flawed treatment.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The plaintiff alleged ordinary and professional negligence arising from COVID-19 infection and lingering symptoms while incarcerated at FCI Schuylkill. The court previously granted the United States's motion for judgment on the pleadings in part and denied it in part, allowing certain negligence claims concerning lingering symptoms and pain of mind to proceed. Magistrate Judge Caraballo later recommended granting summary judgment because the plaintiff offered no necessary expert evidence for his professional-negligence claim and no evidence supporting his ordinary-negligence claims. The district court adopted the recommendation, granted summary judgment, directed entry of judgment for the United States, and closed the case.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- 488 F.3d 187, 194 (3d Cir. 2007)
- 812 F.2d 874, 878-79 (3d Cir. 1987)
- 866 F.3d 93, 99 (3d Cir. 2017)

OPINION

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT MIDDLE DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA RUBEN C. HOLTON, Plaintiff, CIVIL ACTION NO. 4:22-CV-00070 v. (SAPORITO, J.) (CARABALLO, M.J.) UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, Defendant. ORDER Now before the court is a report and recommendation of United States Magistrate Judge Philip J. Caraballo, in which he recommends that the defendant's motion for summary judgment (Doc.

58) be granted. (Doc. 63). On March 11, 2025, we adopted, as modified, a report and recommendation from United States Magistrate Judge William I. Arbuckle¹ (Doc. 50) granting the United States's motion for judgment on the pleadings in part and denying it in part. (Doc. 52). While noting that the plaintiff had failed to support his claims of ordinary and professional 1 This case has been reassigned to Magistrate Judge Phillip J. Caraballo since Magistrate Judge Arbuckle issued his Report and Recommendation.

Magistrate Judge Arbuckle has since retired. negligence against the government for the plaintiff's alleged injury of contracting COVID-19 while being housed at the Federal Correctional Institution, Schuylkill ("FCI Schuylkill"), we found that the plaintiff had sufficiently supported his claims of ordinary and professional negligence as to the plaintiff's lingering and permanent COVID-19 symptoms and "pain of mind" injuries.

But we explained that our "holding ... does not excuse the plaintiff's burden in proving the requisite elements of a medical malpractice claim including potential testimony from a medical expert to prevail on that claim" and "does not impact the potential viability of the defendant's

contention that the plaintiff needs to present expert testimony to ultimately prevail on his claim.” (, at 24, 25 n.9).

In other words, we found that while the plaintiff had alleged sufficient facts to survive a motion for judgment on the pleadings, the plaintiff’s allegations alone were not enough to survive a potential motion for summary judgment.

Here, Judge Carballo echoes this sentiment in his report and recommendation. Upon review of the government’s motion for summary judgment, Judge Caraballo found that the while the government introduced expert evidence to support its motion, the plaintiff “seeks to survive summary judgment by leveraging the Court’s decision on the United States’ motion for judgment on the pleadings” rather than offering any necessary expert evidence for his professional negligence claim or any evidence to support his ordinary negligence claims to survive summary judgment.

(Doc. 63, at 30, 36) (“Holton was required to produce his own supporting expert testimony. His failure to do so precludes him from succeeding on his medical negligence claim” and “Holton has not offered any expert evidence to create a genuine issue of fact concerning his professional negligence claim [] and no reasonable factfinder could find that the United States committed medical malpractice based on the existing record”); (, at 43) (“Nothing in the record evinces any refusal to administer, or delays in administering[,] medical treatment, and Holton does not identify any evidence corroborating his claim.

Nor does he explain, through evidence or otherwise, how the treatment he received was flawed or delayed....”). Indeed, Judge Caraballo found that the record indicated that the plaintiff received consistent treatment from prison medical staff in response to the plaintiff’s complaints and that the plaintiff’s lingering COVID-19 symptoms were caused by actions independent of the government’s action.

For the foregoing reasons, Judge Caraballo recommends granting the government’s motion for summary judgment. No timely objections have been filed to the report and recommendation, resulting in the forfeiture of de novo review by this court., 488 F.3d 187, 194 (3d Cir. 2007);, 812 F.2d 874, 878–79 (3d Cir. 1987). Following an independent review of the report and the record, and having afforded “reasoned consideration” to the uncontested portions of the report,, 866 F.3d 93, 99 (3d Cir.

2017), we are satisfied “that there is no clear error on the face of the record,” Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b) advisory committee note to 1983 amendment. We find Judge Caraballo’s analysis to be well-reasoned and fully supported by the record and applicable law.

Accordingly, the court will adopt the report and recommendation in its entirety as the decision of the court. Accordingly, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT: 1. The report and recommendation of

Judge Caraballo (Doc. 63) is ADOPTED in its entirety; and 2.

The defendants' motion for summary judgment (Doc. 58) is GRANTED; and 3. The Clerk shall enter judgment in favor of the defendant. 4. The Clerk shall close this case. Dated: March 3, 2026
JOSEPH F. SAPORITO, JR. United States District Judge