

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF MARYLAND

Wilson v. State of Maryland, et al.

Wilson · No. Civil Action No. GLR-25-2955 · Decided March 11, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of Maryland granted motions to dismiss filed by the Baltimore City Police Department, the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore, and the State of Maryland. The court held that the City was not liable for the alleged conduct of a Baltimore City police officer, sovereign immunity barred the claims against the Police Department, and the State retained immunity from the state-law claims. The dismissal was without prejudice as to those defendants; claims against Officer Morales-Mendez remained pending.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Maryland
WRITING FOR THE COURT	George L. Russell, III
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Maryland
DECIDED	March 11, 2026
DOCKET	Civil Action No. GLR-25-2955
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff brought state constitutional, common-law, Section 1983, and negligence claims arising from his arrest and incarceration after a vehicle collision. The Mayor and City Council of Baltimore, Baltimore City Police Department, and State of Maryland moved to dismiss under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6). The court granted all three motions and dismissed the claims against those defendants without prejudice.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	On a Rule 12(b)(6) motion, the court tests the sufficiency of the complaint rather than resolving factual disputes or the merits. The court accepts well-pleaded factual allegations as true and construes them in the plaintiff's favor, but need not accept conclusory allegations or legal conclusions couched as facts. A complaint must contain sufficient factual matter to state a claim that is plausible on its face.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court memorandum opinion; persuasive authority only

PARTIES

DeShawn Wilson v. State of Maryland, Mayor and City Council of Baltimore, Baltimore City Police Department, Kenneth Morales-Mendez

TOPICS

motions to dismiss

sovereign immunity

government liability

section 1983

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

civil rights

constitutional law

government liability

sovereign immunity

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore could be held liable under Maryland law for the alleged conduct of a Baltimore City Police Department officer.
2. Whether the Baltimore City Police Department was protected by sovereign immunity from Wilson's state constitutional and common-law claims.
3. Whether the State of Maryland was protected by sovereign immunity from Wilson's state-law claims arising from the conduct of Baltimore City police personnel.
4. Whether Wilson could assert new Section 1983 and indemnification theories against the institutional defendants through briefing when those theories were not pleaded in the complaint.

HOLDINGS

1. The Mayor and City Council of Baltimore cannot be held liable on Wilson's state-law claims based on respondeat superior for the conduct of a Baltimore City Police Department officer because the Baltimore City Police Department is an agency of the State, not the City.
2. The Baltimore City Police Department is protected by common-law sovereign immunity as a state agency from Wilson's state constitutional and common-law claims.
3. The State of Maryland retains sovereign immunity from Wilson's state-law claims because the Maryland Tort Claims Act's waiver does not apply to the alleged conduct of Baltimore City Police Department personnel.
4. Wilson could not amend his complaint through opposition briefs to add Section 1983 or indemnification theories that were not pleaded against the institutional defendants.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"Put simply, Wilson "cannot bring state-law claims against the City based on the actions of [Officer Morales-Mendez]."" (II.B.1)

"Under longstanding caselaw, the Baltimore City Police Department "exists as an agency of the State, and therefore enjoys the common law sovereign immunity from tort liability."" (II.B.2)

"The doctrine of state sovereign immunity is "firmly embedded in the law of Maryland."" (II.B.3)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

On April 17, 2022, DeShawn Wilson was seriously injured in a vehicle collision in Baltimore City and was hospitalized in a coma for three days. Baltimore City Police Officer Kenneth Morales-Mendez investigated the collision and reported that a firefighter had observed a handgun in Wilson's vehicle; an application for charges led to a warrant for knowingly transporting a firearm while Wilson was still hospitalized. Wilson alleged that he never possessed or knew of the firearm and that inconsistencies existed between the officer's account and body-worn-camera footage. The firearm charges were later dropped, after which Wilson sued the State, Baltimore City, the Baltimore City Police Department, and the officer for malicious prosecution, due process violations, Section 1983 violations, and negligence.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Wilson filed the complaint in the Circuit Court for Baltimore City on July 25, 2025. The Mayor and City Council of Baltimore and the Baltimore City Police Department removed the action to the United States District Court for the District of Maryland on September 8, 2025, based on federal-question jurisdiction. The three institutional defendants moved to dismiss; Officer Morales-Mendez filed an answer. The court granted the motions to dismiss filed by the State, the Mayor and City Council, and the Baltimore City Police Department, while the action continued against Morales-Mendez.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007)
- King v. Rubenstein, 825 F.3d 206, 214 (4th Cir. 2016)
- Edwards v. City of Goldsboro, 178 F.3d 231, 243 (4th Cir. 1999)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009)
- Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007)
- Goss v. Bank of Am., N.A., 917 F. Supp. 2d 445, 449 (D. Md. 2013), *aff'd*, 546 F. App'x 165 (4th Cir. 2013)
- Walters v. McMahan, 684 F.3d 435, 439 (4th Cir. 2012)
- Albright v. Oliver, 510 U.S. 266, 268 (1994)
- Lambeth v. Bd. of Comm'rs of Davidson Cnty., 407 F.3d 266, 268 (4th Cir. 2005)
- United Black Firefighters v. Hirst, 604 F.2d 844, 847 (4th Cir. 1979)
- Mayor & City Council of Balt. v. Clark, 944 A.2d 1122, 1130 (Md. 2008)
- Clea v. Mayor & City Council of Balt., 541 A.2d 1303, 1306 (Md. 1988)
- Nicholson v. Balt. Police Dep't, No. DKC 20-3146, 2021 WL 1541667, at *10 (D. Md. Apr. 20, 2021)
- Balt. Police Dep't v. Cherkes, 780 A.2d 410, 428 (Md. Ct. Spec. App. 2001)
- Tillery v. U.S. Marshals Serv., No. SAG-23-00402, 2024 WL 3598117, at *5 (D. Md. July 31, 2024)
- Burley v. Balt. Police Dep't, 422 F. Supp. 3d 986, 1024, 1026 (D. Md. 2019)

- Hurst v. District of Columbia, 681 F. App'x 186, 194 (4th Cir. 2017)
- Monell v. Department of Social Services, 436 U.S. 658 (1978)
- Katz v. Wash. Suburban Sanitary Comm'n, 397 A.2d 1027, 1030 (Md. 1979)
- Harrell v. Bealefeld, No. CCB-11-3046, 2013 WL 931677, at *3 (D. Md. Mar. 7, 2013)
- Houghton v. Forrest, 989 A.2d 223, 230 (Md. 2010)

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