

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, APPELLATE DIVISION,
FIRST DEPARTMENT

Xenias v. City of New York

2021 NY Slip Op 00647 (App. Div. 2021) · No. Appeal Nos. 13040-13041-13042N-13042NA; Case No. 2019-03417(3); Index No. 100988/14 · Decided February 4, 2021

SUMMARY

The Appellate Division, First Department reversed several orders dismissing Anastasia Xenias's claims against the City of New York arising from an alleged delay in dispatching an ambulance. The court held that the allegations sufficiently pleaded a special relationship, including an affirmative duty assumed through the 911 operator's statement and justifiable reliance, and that governmental function immunity did not warrant dismissal at that stage. Claims concerning FDNY conduct after arrival were not considered because they were not included in the notice of claim.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of the State of New York, Appellate Division, First Department
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Gische, J.P.; Kapnick, J.; Mazzairelli, J.; Moulton, J.
JURISDICTION	New York
DECIDED	February 4, 2021
DOCKET	Appeal Nos. 13040-13041-13042N-13042NA; Case No. 2019-03417(3); Index No. 100988/14
DISPOSITION	reversed_and_remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff appealed several orders of Supreme Court, New York County, including an order granting defendants' motion to dismiss the complaint, an order denying as moot plaintiff's motion to strike defendants' answer, and orders denying or resolving motions to renew and reargue.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	De novo review of orders resolving a motion to dismiss and related motions, including whether the pleadings sufficiently state a claim.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	published opinion
PARTIES	Anastasia Xenias, as Administrator of the Estate of Mike S. Xenias v. City of New York, et al.

TOPICS

municipal liability

negligence

motions to dismiss

appellate procedure

standard of review

PRACTICE AREAS

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether plaintiff sufficiently alleged a special relationship between the City and the decedent, including an assumption of an affirmative duty and justifiable reliance, to invoke the exception to municipal immunity for duties owed to the general public.
2. Whether dismissal was appropriate under governmental-function immunity where the alleged delay might have resulted from an unintentional failure to timely dispatch an ambulance rather than an affirmative exercise of governmental discretion.
3. Whether claims concerning FDNY conduct after arriving at the scene could be considered when that theory was not disclosed in the notice of claim.
4. Whether plaintiff's motion to strike defendants' answer should have been denied as moot rather than decided on the merits.

HOLDINGS

1. Plaintiff's allegations sufficiently established a special relationship between the City and the decedent, bringing the claim within the exception to the general rule that a municipality is not liable for breach of a duty owed to the general public.
2. Dismissal was not appropriate under governmental-function immunity at this stage because it was unclear whether the alleged delay resulted from an affirmative exercise of discretion or an unintentional failure to timely dispatch an ambulance.
3. Claims based on FDNY conduct after arriving at the scene were not properly considered because that theory was not disclosed in plaintiff's notice of claim.

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The decedent's estate alleged that a 911 operator told plaintiff, "we are on our way," but that FDNY never arrived before the decedent required emergency assistance. Plaintiff alleged that she relied on that assurance and refrained from taking several additional actions to secure help. The complaint asserted municipal liability based on the City's alleged failure to timely dispatch emergency medical assistance.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The Supreme Court, New York County, granted defendants' motion to dismiss the complaint. It later denied plaintiff's motion to strike defendants' answer as moot and, on reargument, adhered to its prior dismissal determination; it also denied plaintiff's second motion to renew. The Appellate Division unanimously reversed

the dismissal order, denied the motion to dismiss, remanded the motion to strike for determination on the merits, and vacated the orders concerning reargument and renewal.

DISPOSITION

reversed_and_remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

The motion to strike defendants' answer, previously denied as moot, was remanded to Supreme Court for determination on the merits. The motion to dismiss was denied, and the orders resolving reargument and renewal were vacated.

CASES CITED

- Cuffy v. City of New York, 69 NY2d 255, 260 [1987]
- De Long v. County of Erie, 60 NY2d 296, 305 [1983]
- Grieshaber v. City of Albany, 279 AD2d 232, 235 [3d Dept 2001], lv denied 96 NY2d 719 [2001]
- Applewhite v. Accuhealth, Inc., 21 NY3d 420, 427-431 [2013]
- Leon v. Martinez, 84 NY2d 83, 88 [1994]
- Valdez v. City of New York, 18 NY3d 69, 75-76, 79-80 [2011]
- Sherpa v. New York City Health & Hospitals Corp., 90 AD3d 738, 740 [2d Dept 2011]
- Dixon v. City of New York, 120 AD3d 751, 753 [2d Dept 2014], lv denied 26 NY3d 913 [2015]
- Pratts v. Campolo, 150 AD3d 549 [1st Dept 2017]

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

Xenias v City of New York (2021 NY Slip Op 00647) Xenias v City of New York 2021 NY Slip Op 00647 Decided on February 04, 2021 Appellate Division, First Department Published by New York State Law Reporting Bureau pursuant to Judiciary Law § 431. This opinion is uncorrected and subject to revision before publication in the Official Reports. Decided and Entered: February 04, 2021 Before: Gische, J.P., Kapnick, Mazzairelli, Moulton, JJ. Index No. 100988/14 Appeal No. 13040-13041-13042N-13042NA Case No. 2019-03417(3) [*1]Anastasia Xenias, as Administrator of the Estate of Mike S. Xenias, Plaintiff-Appellant, vCity of New York et al., Defendants-Respondents.

Anastasia Xenias, PhD, appellant pro se. James E. Johnson, Corporation Counsel, New York (Daniel Matza-Brown of counsel), for respondents. Order, Supreme Court, New York County (Alexander M. Tisch, J.), entered December 21, 2018, which, insofar as appealed from as limited by the briefs, granted defendants' motion to dismiss the complaint, unanimously reversed, on the law, without costs, and the motion denied.

Order, same court and Justice, entered January 29, 2019, which denied plaintiff's motion to strike defendants' answer as moot, unanimously reversed, on the law, without costs, and the motion remanded for determination on the merits. Order, same court and Justice, entered June 3, 2019, which, insofar as appealed from as limited by the briefs, denied the branch of plaintiff's motion seeking to renew the motion to dismiss, granted, in effect, the branch of the motion seeking to reargue, and, upon reargument, adhered to the prior determination, unanimously reversed, on the law, without costs, and the order vacated.

Order, same court and Justice, entered February 5, 2020, which denied plaintiff's second motion to renew the motion to dismiss, unanimously reversed, on the law, without costs, and the order vacated. Plaintiff's allegations are sufficient to establish a special relationship between the City and the decedent that brings her claim within the exception to the general rule that a municipality may not be held liable to a person injured by the breach of a duty that it owes to the general public — such as the duty to provide ambulance service (see *Cuffy v City of New York*, 69 NY2d 255, 260 [1987]).

The allegation that the 911 operator told plaintiff that "we are on our way" is sufficient to establish defendants' assumption of an affirmative duty to act on the decedent's behalf (see *De Long v County of Erie*, 60 NY2d 296, 305 [1983]; *Grieshaber v City of Albany*, 279 AD2d 232, 235 [3d Dept 2001], lv denied 96 NY2d 719 [2001]). Plaintiff sufficiently alleged justifiable reliance on the call operator's statement through an affidavit submitted in opposition to defendants' motion in which she listed several additional actions she would have taken to secure help but for the operator's assurance (see *Applewhite v Accuhealth, Inc.*, 21 NY3d 420, 431 [2013]; see also *Leon v Martinez*, 84 NY2d 83, 88 [1994]).

The remaining elements are not at issue (see *Cuffy*, 69 NY2d at 260). Dismissal is also not appropriate at this stage pursuant to the doctrine of governmental function immunity, which shields public entities from liability for "discretionary" actions taken during the performance of "governmental functions" (*Valdez v City of New York*, 18 NY3d 69, 75-76 [2011]).

It is undisputed that the provision of emergency care by FDNY EMTs constitutes a governmental function (see *Applewhite*, 21 NY3d at 427-30). It is also clear that determinations of whether and when to dispatch an ambulance, the type of ambulance to dispatch and from where, and the route the ambulance should take are discretionary in nature (see *Sherpa v New York City Health & Hosps.*

Corp., 90 AD3d 738, 740 [2d Dept 2011]; *Dixon v [*2]City of New York*, 120 AD3d 751, 753 [2d Dept 2014], lv denied 26 NY3d 913 [2015]). However, it is not clear that the delay at issue here was due to an affirmative exercise of this discretion, rather than an unintentional failure to timely dispatch an ambulance (see generally *Valdez*, 18 NY3d at 79-80).

To the extent plaintiff's claims relate to FDNY's actions after arriving on the scene, they are not properly considered, as this theory of liability was not disclosed in plaintiff's notice of claim, which specifically alleged that FDNY never arrived, let alone treated the decedent (see General Municipal Law §§ 50-e; 50-i[1][a]; *Pratts v Campolo*, 150 AD3d 549 [1st Dept 2017]).THIS CONSTITUTES THE DECISION AND ORDER OF THE SUPREME COURT, APPELLATE DIVISION, FIRST DEPARTMENT.

ENTERED: February 4, 2021