

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Scoggins v. Falcon Court

Scoggins · No. 1:24-cv-00188-KES-SKO · Decided March 28, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California partially adopted findings and recommendations concerning Danell Scoggins’s claims against Falcon Court and Turning Point of Central California. The court dismissed the action for failure to state a cognizable claim but granted leave to file a second amended complaint asserting a possible Fair Housing Act retaliation claim based on a notice to quit.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	March 28, 2025
DOCKET	1:24-cv-00188-KES-SKO
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	A pro se plaintiff proceeding in forma pauperis objected to a magistrate judge's recommendation to dismiss her first amended complaint without leave to amend. The district court adopted the findings and recommendations in part, dismissed for failure to state a cognizable claim, and granted one final opportunity to amend.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	De novo consideration of the objected-to findings and recommendations under 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(B); the complaint was assessed for whether it stated a cognizable claim.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unpublished federal district court order; limited persuasive value.
PARTIES	Danell R. Scoggins v. Falcon Court, Turning Point of Central California

TOPICS

- pleadings
- motion to amend
- civil procedure
- civil rights
- landlord tenant

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the first amended complaint stated a cognizable claim under the Fair Housing Act.
2. Whether the plaintiff's objections and subsequently submitted notice to quit warranted leave to amend a Fair Housing Act retaliation claim.
3. What allegations were required in the second amended complaint.

HOLDINGS

1. The first amended complaint failed to state a cognizable claim.
2. The plaintiff was granted one final opportunity to amend because her objections and notice to quit identified evidence that, if adequately pleaded, might establish a Fair Housing Act retaliation claim.
3. Any second amended complaint must be complete in itself, allege all facts supporting the Fair Housing Act retaliation claim, and not rely on the prior pleadings.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“To establish a prima facie case of retaliation [under the Fair Housing Act], a plaintiff must show that (1) [she] engaged in a protected activity; (2) the defendant subjected [her] to an adverse action; and (3) a causal link exists between the protected activity and the adverse action.” (Opinion at 2)

“Accordingly, while the Court grants plaintiff leave to replead her claim for retaliation under the Fair Housing Act, plaintiff must fully allege in any second amended complaint all allegations that support her claim.” (Opinion at 3)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Scoggins alleged that the defendants discriminated against her based on disability, sexual orientation, and religion. After filing this action and objecting to the recommendation to dismiss, she received a three-day notice to quit from her landlord for alleged breaches of covenant. She characterized the notice as additional evidence of retaliation, and the district court concluded that the timing and contents of the notice might support a Fair Housing Act retaliation claim if included and adequately explained in an amended complaint.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Scoggins initiated the action on February 9, 2024. The magistrate judge screened the complaint, construed it as asserting an Eighth Amendment claim and Fair Housing Act disability-discrimination and retaliation claims, found the allegations insufficient, and allowed amendment. After reviewing the first amended complaint, the magistrate judge recommended dismissal without leave to amend. Scoggins objected and submitted a landlord's three-day notice to quit, which the district court found could support a Fair Housing Act retaliation claim if properly pleaded in a second amended complaint.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green, 411 U.S. 792 (1973)
- Walker v. City of Lakewood, 272 F.3d 1114, 1128 (9th Cir. 2001)
- Washington v. Farmington Estates Owners Ass'n, 2022 WL 18399534, at *6 (D. Or. July 13, 2022)
- Elliot v. QF Circa 37, LLC, No. 16-cv-0288-BAS-AGS, 2018 WL 2933467, at *20 (S.D. Cal. June 12, 2018)
- East-Miller v. Lake County Highway Development, 421 F.3d 558, 563 (7th Cir. 2005)
- Neighorn v. Quest Health Care, 870 F. Supp. 2d 1069, 1103–04
- Thomas v. City of Beaverton, 379 F.3d 802, 812 (9th Cir. 2004)
- Donaghey v. Moorpark Bellingham Homeowners Ass'n, Inc., No. 2:22-cv-08524-DSF-MAA, 2023 WL 9318509, at *5 (C.D. Cal. Nov. 29, 2023)
- Lacey v. Maricopa County, 693 F.3d 896, 927 (9th Cir. 2012)

OPINION

Scoggins v. Falcon Court

PER CURIAM.

1 2 3 4 5 6

7 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

8 EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

9 10 DANELL R. SCOGGINS, Case No. 1:24-cv-00188-KES-SKO 11 Plaintiffs, ORDER
ADOPTING FINDINGS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS IN PART,

12 v. DISMISSING

13 (Doc. 9)

FALCON COURT, TURNING POINT OF

14 CENTRAL CALIFORNIA,

15 Defendants. 16

17 18 Plaintiff Danell Scoggins proceeds pro se and in forma pauperis in this civil action which 19
she initiated on February 9, 2024. Docs. 1, 2. This matter was referred to a United States 20
Magistrate Judge pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(B) and Local Rule 302. 21 On May 8, 2024,
the assigned magistrate judge screened plaintiff's complaint and the 22 magistrate judge construed
the allegations in the complaint to assert an Eighth Amendment claim 23 and claims of disability
discrimination and retaliation under the Fair Housing Act. Doc. 7. The 24 magistrate judge found
that the complaint failed to allege sufficient facts to make out those claims 25 and granted plaintiff
an opportunity to amend her complaint. Doc. 7. Plaintiff filed a first 26 amended complaint on
May 21, 2024. Doc. 9. Upon reviewing the first amended complaint, the 27 assigned magistrate

issued findings and recommendation recommending that this action be 28 1 dismissed without leave to amend due to plaintiff's failure to state a cognizable claim. Doc. 10. 2 On August 13, 2024, plaintiff filed objections to the findings and recommendation. Doc. 11. On 3 August 16, 2024, she filed a notice which states that, the day after she filed her objections, her 4 landlord provided a three-day notice to quit for breaches of covenant. Doc. 12. The landlord's notice to quit is attached to her notice. See id. at 3. Plaintiff contends that this notice to quit is 5 "additional evidence of retaliation" See id. at 1. 6 Plaintiff's objections and additional notice provide evidence which, if included in her 7 complaint, may allow her to make out a claim for retaliation under the Fair Housing Act. "As 8 with any retaliation claim, [courts must] apply the familiar burden-shifting analysis established by 9 the Supreme Court in McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green, 411 U.S. 792 (1973)." Walker v. City 10 of Lakewood, 272 F.3d 1114, 1128 (9th Cir. 2001). "To establish a prima facie case of retaliation 11 [under the Fair Housing Act], a plaintiff must show that (1) [she] engaged in a protected activity; 12 (2) the defendant subjected [her] to an adverse action; and (3) a causal link exists between the 13 protected activity and the adverse action." Id. "If a plaintiff has presented a prima facie 14 retaliation claim, the burden shifts to the defendant to articulate a legitimate nondiscriminatory 15 reason for its decision." Id. "If the defendant articulates such a reason, the plaintiff bears the 16 ultimate burden of demonstrating that the reason was merely a pretext for a discriminatory 17 motive." Id. 18 As for the first element, "[f]iling a lawsuit [] to enforce rights under the Fair Housing Act 19 is a protected activity." E.g., Washington v. Farmington Estates Owners Ass'n, 2022 WL 20 18399534, at *6 (D. Or. July 13, 2022). Plaintiff filed this lawsuit alleging that defendants 21 discriminated against her on numerous bases: disability, sexual orientation, and religion. Doc. 9 22 at 4. Although her complaint failed to flesh out the details of any disability and did not describe 23 her sexual orientation or religion, see Doc. 9, it is at least clear that she intended to allege that defendants had discriminated against her on those bases, as the findings and recommendations 24 correctly recognized, see Doc. 10 at 4. Therefore, plaintiff may be able to establish the first 25 element of a retaliation claim if given a chance to amend the complaint. 26 Second, under the Fair Housing Act, an adverse action must come in the form of 27 "coerc[ion], intimidat[ion], threat[s], or interfere[nce]." Walker, 272 F.3d at 1128 (quoting 42 28 1 U.S.C. § 3617). "'Interference' has been broadly applied to reach all practices which have the 2 effect of interfering with the exercise of rights under the federal fair housing laws." Id. Eviction 3 proceedings and threats of legal action against the plaintiff may constitute adverse actions. Elliot 4 v. QF Circa 37, LLC, No. 16-cv-0288-BAS-AGS, 2018 WL 2933467, at *20 (S.D. Cal. June 12, 2018). Here, among other evidence, plaintiff has submitted the landlord's notice to quit, which 5 states that it requires plaintiff to vacate the premises and threatens legal action against her if she 6 does not. Plaintiff may be able to allege that defendants took adverse action against her. 1 7 Third, "a plaintiff must show that a defendant took an adverse action with the intent to 8 retaliate against the plaintiff." Id. (citing East-Miller v. Lake Cty. Highway Dev., 421 F.3d 558, 9 563 (7th Cir.

2005)). “Such intent demonstrates a causal connection between the adverse action 10 and the protected activity.” Id. “Under the McDonnell Douglas[] framework, timing alone may 11 be sufficient to support the inference of a retaliatory motive if the protected activity and the 12 allegedly retaliatory employment action are sufficiently close in time.” *Neighorn v. Quest Health 13 Care*, 870 F. Supp. 2d 1069, 1103–04 (citing *Thomas v. City of Beaverton*, 379 F.3d 802, 812 14 (9th Cir. 2004)). Here, plaintiff filed objections to the findings and recommendations on 15 August 13, 2024, and the next day, she was served with a three-day notice to quit for breaches of 16 covenant. See Doc. 12. This close temporal proximity may be a sufficient basis to infer 17 retaliatory motive. “[P]roximity in time between the protected activity and the allegedly 18 retaliatory decision can constitute some evidence of a retaliatory motive or of a causal link.” 19 *Donaghey v. Moorpark Bellingham Homeowners Ass’n, Inc.*, No. 2:22-cv-08524-DSF-MAA, 20 2023 WL 9318509, at *5 (C.D. Cal. Nov. 29, 2023) (quotations omitted). 21 The Court concludes that findings and recommendations are correct that plaintiff’s first 22 amended complaint does not state a cognizable claim. However, because plaintiff’s 23 subsequently-filed objections and notice identify evidence that may, if sufficiently spelled out in a second amended complaint, enable her to state a claim for retaliation under the Fair Housing Act, 24 the Court will give plaintiff the opportunity to amend her complaint one final time. 25 Plaintiff is informed that an amended complaint supersedes a prior complaint. Lacey 26 27 1 The Court notes that, at the second step of the McDonnell Douglas framework, defendants may be able to establish a legitimate, nondiscriminatory basis for their alleged action. The notice to 28 quit identifies seven distinct violations by plaintiff of her rental agreement. See Doc. 12 at 3. 1 | *v. Maricopa Cnty.*, 693 F.3d 896, 927 (9th Cir. 2012). An amended complaint must be 2 | “complete in itself without reference to the prior or superseded pleading.” L.R. 220. 3 | Accordingly, while the Court grants plaintiff leave to amend to replead her claim for 4 | retaliation under the Fair Housing Act, plaintiff must fully allege in any second amended 5 | complaint all allegations that support her claim. 6 Accordingly: 7 1. The findings and recommendations issued on July 31, 2024, Doc. 10, are adopted in 8 part; 9 2. This action is dismissed with leave to amend due to plaintiff’s failure to state a 10 cognizable claim; 11 3. Plaintiff must file any second amended complaint, consistent with the terms of this 12 Order, within thirty (30) days of the date of this Order; and 13 4. This matter is referred back to the assigned magistrate judge for the preparation of 14 further findings and recommendations and/or other appropriate action. 15 16

17 | TIS SO ORDERED. _

18 Dated: _ March 27, 2025 4h

9 UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

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