

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
TEXAS, SHERMAN DIVISION

Andrea K. Pitts v. Serrato Corporation d/b/a North Texas Job Corps
Center

Civil No. 4:25-CV-528-SDJ · No. Civil No. 4:25-CV-528-SDJ · Decided February 11, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Texas considers Serrato Corporation’s Rule 12(b)(6) motion to dismiss Andrea K. Pitts’s wrongful-discharge claim under Texas law. The court holds that Pitts failed to plead facts showing that she was discharged solely for refusing to perform an illegal act, dismisses Count Three without prejudice, and grants leave to amend by February 27, 2026.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Texas, Sherman Division
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of Texas, Sherman Division
DECIDED	February 11, 2026
DOCKET	Civil No. 4:25-CV-528-SDJ
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendant moved under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6) to dismiss Count Three of Plaintiff's complaint, which asserted wrongful discharge under Texas law. Plaintiff did not respond. The court evaluated the motion on the merits, dismissed Count Three without prejudice, and granted leave to amend.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	On a Rule 12(b)(6) motion, the court considers the complaint and certain incorporated or central documents, accepts well-pleaded facts as true, views them in the light most favorable to the plaintiff, and determines whether the pleaded facts state a plausible claim for relief.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown; memorandum opinion and order from a federal district court with no reported citation identified.
PARTIES	Andrea K. Pitts v. Serrato Corporation d/b/a North Texas Job Corps Center

TOPICS

motions to dismiss

wrongful termination

employment at-will

title vii

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

employment law

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wrongful termination

title vii

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Pitts plausibly pleaded a Texas wrongful-discharge claim under the narrow public-policy exception to employment at will.
2. Whether the motion to dismiss could be granted solely because Pitts failed to respond.

HOLDINGS

1. Pitts failed to state a plausible Texas wrongful-discharge claim because she did not allege that Serrato asked her to perform an illegal act, that she refused to perform it, or that her discharge was based solely on that refusal.
2. A district court may not grant a motion to dismiss solely because the plaintiff failed to oppose it; the court must evaluate the merits of the motion.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Wrongful discharge is such an exception, but it is “very narrow,” applying only to “the discharge of an employee for the sole reason that the employee refused to perform an illegal act.””

“But the Court does not grant the motion to dismiss solely based on Pitts’s failure to respond; rather, it will evaluate the merits of Serrato’s arguments.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Andrea K. Pitts worked for approximately twenty-nine years at the North Texas Job Corps Center, including under Serrato Corporation after it assumed operations. Serrato disciplined Pitts after allegations that she used inappropriate language and later disclosed confidential information, and ultimately terminated her employment. Pitts alleged that a Hispanic employee who disclosed confidential information was not disciplined or discharged, and that Serrato retaliated against her for filing an internal discrimination complaint. Her complaint also asserted a Texas wrongful-discharge claim, but did not allege that Serrato asked her to perform an illegal act or that she was terminated for refusing to do so.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Pitts sued Serrato asserting race discrimination, retaliation, and wrongful discharge. Serrato moved to dismiss only the wrongful-discharge count under Rule 12(b)(6). The court granted the motion as to Count Three, denied it insofar as it sought disposition based solely on Plaintiff’s failure to respond, and allowed Pitts to file an amended complaint.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Webb v. Morella, 457 F. App'x 448, 452 n.4 (5th Cir. 2012) (per curiam)
- Lone Star Fund V (U.S.), L.P. v. Barclays Bank PLC, 594 F.3d 383, 387 (5th Cir. 2010)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678-80, 129 S. Ct. 1937, 173 L. Ed. 2d 868 (2009)
- Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 556, 570, 127 S. Ct. 1955, 167 L. Ed. 2d 929 (2007)
- In re Katrina Canal Breaches Litig., 495 F.3d 191, 205 (5th Cir. 2007)
- Montgomery Cnty. Hosp. Dist. v. Brown, 965 S.W.2d 501, 502 (Tex. 1998)
- Sabine Pilot Serv., Inc. v. Hauck, 687 S.W.2d 733, 735 (Tex. 1985)

OPINION

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT EASTERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS SHERMAN DIVISION ANDREA K. PITTS § § v. § CIVIL NO. 4:25-CV-528-SDJ § SERRATO CORPORATION § d/b/a NORTH TEXAS JOBS CORPS § CENTER § MEMORANDUM OPINION AND ORDER Before the Court is Defendant Serrato Corporation's Motion to Dismiss Count Three of Plaintiff's Complaint. (Dkt. #9). Serrato Corporation ("Serrato") did not move to dismiss counts one or two.

Plaintiff Andrea K. Pitts did not respond to the motion. The Court, having considered the motion and the applicable legal authorities, concludes that the motion should be GRANTED in part and DENIED in part. I. BACKGROUND Pitts was previously employed as a career technical training manager by Serrato, in relation to Serrato's contract with the U.S. Department of Labor to operate the North Texas Job Corps Center ("NTJCC").

(Dkt. #1 ¶¶ 2, 13–14). Pitts began employment with the NTJCC in 1994, before Serrato took over operations, and continued to work there for twenty-nine years, until 2023, when Serrato terminated her employment. (Dkt. #1 ¶¶ 13–14). Pitts claims that in 2022, another employee disclosed Pitts's confidential information to other Serrato employees in violation of company policy.

(Dkt. #1 ¶ 17). Pitts filed a complaint, but the other employee was never disciplined. (Dkt. #1 ¶ 17). Nearly a year after Pitts filed her complaint, she received a discipline notice after two other Serrato employees alleged that she had used inappropriate language during a meeting. (Dkt. #1 ¶¶ 18–19). Pitts denies using inappropriate language. (Dkt. #1 ¶ 18).

Pitts then filed a second internal complaint with Serrato alleging that she was being discriminated against. (Dkt. #1 ¶ 20). Pitts alleges that Serrato failed to investigate that complaint. (Dkt. #1 ¶ 20). Approximately one month later, Serrato initiated a second discipline notice alleging that Pitts had disclosed confidential information in violation of company policy.

(Dkt. #1 ¶ 20). Pitts denies that accusation. (Dkt. #1 ¶ 24). Serrato subsequently terminated Pitts's employment. (Dkt. #1 ¶ 20). Pitts alleges that Serrato engaged in racial discrimination when she was "accused of disclosing confidential information," disciplined, and discharged. (Dkt. #1 ¶¶ 23–24). According to Pitts, this constituted racial discrimination because the other employee who disclosed confidential information, a Hispanic female, was not disciplined or discharged, but Pitts, a black female, was disciplined and discharged when similarly accused.

(Dkt. #1 ¶¶ 17, 23–24). Pitts also argues that she engaged in protected activity when she filed an internal complaint of discrimination, and that Serrato retaliated against her when it terminated her employment nineteen days later. (Dkt. #1 ¶¶ 29–30). Pitts filed a charge of discrimination with the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission ("EEOC") based on racial discrimination and retaliation.

(Dkt. #1 ¶ 5). Her claims were investigated, and the EEOC issued a right to sue letter. (Dkt. #1 ¶¶ 5–6). Subsequently, Pitts sued Serrato, alleging (1) race discrimination, (2) retaliation, and (3) wrongful discharge, all in violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e, et seq. (Dkt. #1 ¶¶ 23–34). Serrato moved to dismiss Pitts's third count, wrongful discharge, pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6), on the ground that Pitts failed to state a claim upon which relief may be granted.

(Dkt. #9). Pitts did not respond to the motion to dismiss. Because Pitts did not respond, the Court presumes that she "does not controvert the facts set out by [Serrato] and has no evidence to offer in opposition to the motion." L.R. CV-7(d). But the Court does not grant the motion to dismiss solely based on Pitts's failure to respond; rather, it will evaluate the merits of Serrato's arguments.

See *Webb v. Morella*, 457 F.App'x 448, 452 n.4 (5th Cir. 2012) (per curiam) (holding that it is improper for a district court to grant a motion to dismiss solely because a plaintiff fails to oppose the motion). II. LEGAL STANDARD Rule 12(b)(6) allows a party to move for dismissal of a complaint when the plaintiff has failed to state a claim upon which relief can be granted.

FED. R. CIV. P. 12(b)(6). When considering a Rule 12(b)(6) motion, "[t]he court's review is limited to the complaint, any documents attached to the complaint, and any documents attached to the motion to dismiss that are central to the claim and referenced by the complaint." *Lone Star Fund V (U.S.), L.P. v. Barclays Bank PLC*, 594 F.3d 383, 387 (5th Cir. 2010).

Under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8(a)(2), a complaint need only contain "a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief." "To survive a motion to dismiss, a complaint must contain sufficient factual matter, accepted as true, to 'state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.'" *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678, 129 S.Ct.

1937, 173 L.Ed.2d 868 (2009) (quoting *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570, 127 S.Ct. 1955, 167 L.Ed.2d 929 (2007)). A claim is plausible when "the plaintiff pleads factual content that

allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Id.* Although a plaintiff is not required to establish a favorable probability that the defendant is liable, the plausibility standard demands “more than a sheer possibility.” *Id.* In assessing a motion to dismiss under Rule 12(b)(6), the court “accepts all well-pleaded facts as true, viewing them in the light most favorable to the plaintiff.” *In re Katrina Canal Breaches Litig.*, 495 F.3d 191, 205 (5th Cir.

2007) (citations omitted). Legal conclusions “must be supported by factual allegations.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 679. To determine whether the plaintiff has pled enough to cross the line “from conceivable to plausible,” a court draws on its own “judicial experience and common sense.” *Id.* at 679–80 (quotations omitted). This threshold is surpassed if the court determines that the plaintiff pled “factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Id.* at 678 (citing *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 556).

III. DISCUSSION Count Three of Pitts’s complaint, alleging wrongful discharge, must be dismissed for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted. In Count Three, Pitts alleges that Serrato “wrongfully discharged and otherwise discriminated against [her]... which is an exception to the employment at will doctrine in Texas.” (Dkt. #1 ¶ 34). There are very few exceptions to Texas’s employment-at-will doctrine; usually, an employee may be terminated “at will, for good cause, bad cause, or no cause at all.” *Montgomery Cnty.*

Hosp. Dist. v. Brown, 965 S.W.2d 501, 502 (Tex. 1998). Wrongful discharge is such an exception, but it is “very narrow,” applying only to “the discharge of an employee for the sole reason that the employee refused to perform an illegal act.” *Sabine Pilot Serv., Inc. v. Hauck*, 687 S.W.2d 733, 735 (Tex. 1985). When alleging wrongful discharge, “it is the plaintiff’s burden to prove by a preponderance of the evidence that [her] discharge was for no reason other than [her] refusal to perform an illegal act.” *Id.* Pitts’s complaint does not include any allegation that Serrato asked her to perform any illegal act, that she refused to do so, or that she was terminated based on such refusal.

Instead, Pitts simply realleges her first two counts in count three, stating that she “was subjected to adverse employment actions due to race and retaliation,” and that Serrato “wrongfully discharged and otherwise discriminated against her.” (Dkt. #1 ¶¶ 33, 34). Even if such facts were alleged, they would not be the “sole reason” Pitts was discharged, as she claims that retaliation was also “a factor in her termination of employment.” (Dkt. #1 ¶ 30).

Thus, Pitts has failed to plead sufficient facts to support a plausible claim of wrongful discharge. See *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 570; *Sabine Pilot Serv.*, 687 S.W.2d at 735. Pitts failed to respond to Serrato’s motion to dismiss. Nor has she amended her complaint to allege facts that would support a freestanding wrongful discharge claim separate from her claims of discrimination and retaliation.

Accordingly, the Court will grant the motion to dismiss this claim. However, the Court will give Pitts the opportunity to replead her wrongful discharge claim. IV. CONCLUSION For the foregoing reasons, Defendant Serrato Corporation's Motion to Dismiss Count Three of Plaintiff's Complaint, (Dkt. #9), is GRANTED in part and DENIED in part. Pitts's claim for wrongful discharge is DISMISSED without prejudice pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6) for failure to state a claim.

It is further ORDERED that Plaintiff Andrea K. Pitts may file an amended complaint pleading sufficient facts to support a claim for wrongful discharge by no later than February 27, 2026.