

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE TENTH CIRCUIT

Hunter v. HCA

No. 19-4034 (10th Cir. May 18, 2020) · No. No. 19-4034 · Decided May 18, 2020

SUMMARY

The Tenth Circuit dismissed Edward G. Hunter's appeal because he failed to file objections to the magistrate judge's report and recommendation. The court applied its firm waiver rule, which waives appellate review of both factual and legal questions when a party fails to object. The court found no applicable exception because Hunter was represented by counsel and did not claim he failed to receive the report.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Allison H. Eid; Holmes; Bacharach; Eid
JURISDICTION	Federal
DECIDED	May 18, 2020
DOCKET	No. 19-4034
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Appeal from district court's adoption of magistrate judge's report and recommendation granting summary judgment in favor of defendants on all claims; court ordered show cause on waiver issue.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished
PARTIES	Edward G. Hunter v. HCA; MountainStar Healthcare; Columbia Ogden Regional Medical Center; Mark Adams; Brian Lines; Mindy Boehm; Ed Ehrenberger; Carla Taylor; Steve Kier; Vicky McCall; Dann Byck; Keith Hancett; Jeff Stephens; Yasmeen Simonian; John Hemmersmeier; Don Cazel; Patrick Willis; John Diemel; Danielle Ihler

TOPICS

- appellate procedure
- preservation of error
- motions to dismiss
- summary judgment
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the plaintiff's failure to file objections to a magistrate judge's report and recommendation constituted waiver of appellate review under the Tenth Circuit's firm waiver rule
2. Whether the firm waiver rule applies absent explicit statutory or rule-based waiver language for dispositive motions
3. Whether the interests-of-justice exception to the firm waiver rule applies

HOLDINGS

1. Failure to make timely objections to a magistrate judge's report and recommendation waives appellate review of both factual and legal questions under the firm waiver rule.
2. The firm waiver rule is neither statutory nor expressly dictated by a procedural rule; it was adopted by the court to advance the policies behind the Magistrate's Act.
3. The interests-of-justice exception applies to a counseled party only in the rare circumstance in which a represented party did not receive a copy of the R&R; plaintiff's contention that the notice language was unclear was insufficient.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"This court has 'adopted a firm waiver rule that provides that the failure to make timely objections to the magistrate[judge's] findings or recommendations waives appellate review of both factual and legal questions.'"

"We do not apply the rule 'when (1) a pro se litigant has not been informed of the time period for objecting and the consequences of failing to object, or when (2) the interests of justice require review.'"

"the interests-of-justice exception applies to a counseled party 'only in the rare circumstance in which a represented party did not receive a copy of the magistrate[judge's] R & R.'"

"[T]he level of notice required for pro se litigants is not pertinent [where] appellant . . . is represented by counsel."

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Edward G. Hunter was employed by Utah Imaging Associates as an interventional radiologist physician assistant with privileges at Ogden Regional Medical Center. He experienced serious health conditions and personal problems that affected his work. He claimed that the hospital and related defendants improperly responded to his health, conduct, and performance issues, contributing to the loss of his medical privileges, termination of his employment with UIA, and loss of his Utah license.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff filed employment-related action in the District of Utah. Defendants moved for summary judgment and plaintiff sought leave to amend his ADA claim. A magistrate judge issued an R&R recommending denial of the amendment as futile and granting summary judgment for defendants. Plaintiff failed to file objections. The district court adopted the R&R in full and entered judgment for defendants. Plaintiff appealed. The Tenth Circuit issued an order to show cause regarding waiver, referred the issue to the panel, and ultimately dismissed the appeal.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- United States v. One Parcel of Real Prop., 73 F.3d 1057 (10th Cir. 1996)
- Morales-Fernandez v. INS, 418 F.3d 1116 (10th Cir. 2005)
- Allman v. Colvin, 813 F.3d 1326 (10th Cir. 2016)
- In re Key Energy Res. Inc., 230 F.3d 1197 (10th Cir. 2000)
- Vega v. Suthers, 195 F.3d 573 (10th Cir. 1999)
- Moore v. United States, 950 F.2d 656 (10th Cir. 1991)
- Theede v. U.S. Dep't of Labor, 172 F.3d 1262 (10th Cir. 1999)

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

FILED United States Court of Appeals UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS Tenth Circuit
FOR THE TENTH CIRCUIT May 18, 2020 _____ Christopher
M. Wolpert Clerk of Court EDWARD G. HUNTER, Plaintiff - Appellant, v. No. 19-4034 (D.C.
No. 1:17-CV-00060-JNP) HCA; MOUNTAINSTAR (D. Utah) HEALTHCARE, aka Mountainstar
Health; COLUMBIA OGDEN REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER, dba Ogden Regional Hospital;
MARK ADAMS, CEO, in official and individual capacity; BRIAN LINES, COO, in official and
individual capacity; MINDY BOEHM, Dr, in official and individual capacity; ED
EHRENBERGER, in official and individual capacity; CARLA TAYLOR, in official and
individual capacity; STEVE KIER, in official and individual capacity; VICKY MCCALL, in
official and individual capacity; DANN BYCK, in official and individual capacity; KEITH
HANCETT, in official and individual capacity; JEFF STEPHENS, in official and individual
capacity; YASMEEN SIMONIAN, in official and individual capacity; JOHN HEMMERSMEIER,
in official and individual capacity; DON CAZEL, in official and individual capacity; PATRICK
WILLIS, in official and individual capacity; JOHN DIEMEL, in official and individual capacity;
DANIELLE IHLER, in official and individual capacity, Defendants - Appellees.

_____ ORDER AND JUDGMENT *
_____ Before HOLMES, BACHARACH, and EID, Circuit

Judges. _____ Edward G. Hunter filed an action against a hospital and related defendants in which he claimed that defendants' actions wrongfully contributed to the termination of his employment and other injuries.

Because Hunter failed to object to the magistrate judge's recommendation to grant summary judgment in favor of defendants on all of his claims, he waived his right to appellate review. Accordingly, we dismiss his appeal.

I. Background Hunter was employed by Utah Imaging Associates ("UIA") as an interventional radiologist physician assistant. He had privileges to perform medical procedures at Ogden Regional Medical Center ("ORMC"). Hunter experienced serious health conditions and personal problems that spilled over into his work. He claimed that ORMC improperly responded to his health, conduct, and performance issues, which contributed to the loss of his medical privileges at ORMC, the * After examining the briefs and appellate record, this panel has determined unanimously that oral argument would not materially assist in the determination of this appeal.

See Fed. R. App. P. 34(a)(2); 10th Cir. R. 34.1(G). The case is therefore ordered submitted without oral argument. This order and judgment is not binding precedent, except under the doctrines of law of the case, res judicata, and collateral estoppel. It may be cited, however, for its persuasive value consistent with Fed. R. App. P. 32.1 and 10th Cir. R. 32.1.

2 termination of his employment with UIA, and the loss of his license with the State of Utah. In response to defendants' summary judgment motion, Hunter argued there were disputed fact issues regarding his breach-of-contract claims. He also sought leave to amend his claim under the Americans with Disabilities Act ("ADA"). A magistrate judge issued a report and recommendation ("R&R") recommending that the district court deny, as futile, Hunter's request to amend his ADA claim and grant summary judgment in favor of defendants.

The R&R advised: "Within fourteen (14) days of being served with a copy, any party may serve and file written objections. See 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b). Failure to object may constitute a waiver of objections upon subsequent review." *Aplt. App.* at 277. Hunter did not file objections to the R&R.

The district court adopted the R&R in full, granted the summary judgment motion, and entered judgment for defendants on all of Hunter's claims. Hunter appealed. This court issued an order to show cause why he had not waived his right to appellate review by failing to object to the R&R.

After Hunter filed a response, the issue was referred to this panel for decision. II. Discussion This court has "adopted a firm waiver rule that provides that the failure to make timely objections to the magistrate[judge's] findings or recommendations waives appellate review of both factual and legal questions." *United States v. One Parcel of Real Prop.*, 73 F.3d 1057, 1059 (10th Cir.

1996) (internal quotation marks 3 omitted). This rule “advance[s] the policies behind the Magistrate’s Act,” including “enabl[ing] the district judge to focus attention on those issues—factual and legal— that are at the heart of the parties’ dispute and giv[ing] the district court an opportunity to correct any errors immediately.” Id. (citation and internal quotation marks omitted).

The firm waiver rule promotes the efficient use of judicial resources based upon “the same rationale that prevents a party from raising an issue before a circuit court of appeals that was not raised before the district court.” Id. at 1060 (brackets and internal quotation marks omitted).

We have recognized two exceptions to the firm waiver rule. We do not apply the rule “when (1) a pro se litigant has not been informed of the time period for objecting and the consequences of failing to object, or when (2) the interests of justice require review.” *Morales-Fernandez v. INS*, 418 F.3d 1116, 1119 (10th Cir. 2005) (internal quotation marks omitted).

The first exception does not apply here because Hunter was represented by counsel in the district court. See *Allman v. Colvin*, 813 F.3d 1326, 1330 (10th Cir. 2016) (holding the first exception was inapplicable because the appellant was represented by counsel); *Key Energy Res. Inc. v. Merrill* (In re *Key Energy Res. Inc.*), 230 F.3d 1197, 1200 (10th Cir. 2000) (“[T]he level of notice required for pro se litigants is not pertinent [where] appellant... is represented by counsel.” (citation omitted)).

And the interests-of-justice exception applies to a counseled party “only in the rare circumstance in which a represented party did not receive a copy of the magistrate[judge’s] R & R.” *Vega v. Suthers*, 195 F.3d 573, 580 (10th Cir. 1999); see also *In re Key Energy Res.*, 230 F.3d at 1200 4 (“[I]n counseled, civil, nonhabeas cases, the merits of the underlying case should not be considered in determining whether the interests of justice exception has been met....

[D]etermination of the interests of justice exception should focus instead on the facts that purport to excuse the lack or untimeliness of the filing of objections.”). Hunter does not claim that he failed to receive the R&R. And his contention that the magistrate judge’s notice was unclear—because it stated only that a failure to object “may” result in a waiver—is insufficient to support an exception.

As noted, a counseled party cannot avoid application of the firm waiver rule by alleging that the R&R did not provide sufficient notice of the potential for waiver. See *In re Key Energy Res.*, 230 F.3d at 1200. In any event, and contrary to Hunter’s suggestion, our provision of limited exceptions to the firm waiver rule demonstrates that the rule is not applied in every case.

Hunter also contends that neither the statute governing referral of dispositive issues to magistrate judges, 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(B), nor the corresponding procedural rule, Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 72(b), “contains... language to the effect that a failure to object to [an R&R] on a dispositive motion may or will constitute a waiver.” Resp. to Ord. to Show Cause at 4.

He notes that Rule 72(a), which addresses magistrate judges' rulings on nondispositive matters, does include a waiver provision. This argument ignores the origin of our firm waiver rule, which is neither statutory nor expressly dictated by a procedural rule. Rather, as explained, 5 we adopted the firm waiver rule to advance the policies behind the Magistrate's Act.

1 As to Hunter's contention that the magistrate judge exceeded his statutory authority by including waiver language in the R&R, the requirement to advise pro se parties of the consequence of a failure to object is likewise grounded in our case law. See *Moore v. United States*, 950 F.2d 656, 659 (10th Cir. 1991) (requiring magistrate judges to advise pro se parties in an R&R of the time period for objecting and the consequent waiver of the right to appeal upon failing to do so).

And as a counseled party, Hunter received more notice regarding the firm waiver rule than our case law requires. III. Conclusion Hunter waived appellate review by failing to file objections to the magistrate judge's R&R.

The appeal is therefore dismissed. See *In re Key Energy Res.*, 230 F.3d at 1201; *Theede v. U.S. Dep't of Labor*, 172 F.3d 1262, 1264, 1268 (10th Cir. 1999). Entered for the Court Allison H. Eid Circuit Judge 1 Moreover, Hunter's contention appears to confuse this court's application of the firm waiver rule on appeal with the effect of a failure to object on the district court's de novo review of an R&R under Rule 72(b)(3).