

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF SOUTH
CAROLINA

Hazel Stoudemire, Sr. v. Sergeant Thomas; Lieutenant Priester;
Captain Livingston; Bryan Stirling; and South Carolina Department
of Corrections

Stoudemire · No. 2:24-cv-124-JFA-MGB · Decided March 2, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of South Carolina adopts the Magistrate Judge’s Report and Recommendation in Hazel Stoudemire, Sr.’s § 1983 and South Carolina Tort Claims Act action. The court overrules Plaintiff’s objections, denies his motions for summary judgment, directed verdict, and declaratory judgment, and grants Defendants’ motions for summary judgment. The court concludes that Plaintiff failed to present sufficient evidence supporting his failure-to-protect and inadequate-medical-care claims.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of South Carolina
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Joseph F. Anderson, Jr.
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of South Carolina
DECIDED	March 2, 2026
DOCKET	2:24-cv-124-JFA-MGB
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff, proceeding pro se and in forma pauperis, objected to a Magistrate Judge's Report and Recommendation addressing cross-motions for summary judgment and related dispositive motions. The district court conducted de novo review of the specifically challenged portions and clear-error review of the remainder, adopted the Report and Recommendation, denied Plaintiff's motions, and granted Defendants' motions for summary judgment.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The district court reviewed de novo the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which specific objections were made and reviewed unobjected-to portions, including portions subject only to general or conclusory objections, for clear error. Summary judgment

was reviewed under the applicable Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 56 standard, and Plaintiff's pro se filings were liberally construed.

PRECEDENTIAL VALUE

unknown

TOPICS

summary judgment

section 1983

prisoners rights

eleventh amendment immunity

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

constitutional law

civil rights

prisoner litigation

remedies

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the Magistrate Judge properly refused to consider untimely or improperly verified documents offered by Plaintiff as evidence opposing summary judgment.
2. Whether Eleventh Amendment immunity applied to Plaintiff's claims against the South Carolina Department of Corrections and Defendants in their official capacities.
3. Whether Plaintiff's claims concerning failure to protect and inadequate medical care were properly analyzed under the Eighth Amendment rather than the Fourteenth Amendment.
4. Whether Plaintiff presented sufficient evidence to satisfy the subjective knowledge requirement for a § 1983 failure-to-protect claim.
5. Whether Plaintiff's general and conclusory objections identified error in the Report and Recommendation warranting rejection of the recommendation.

HOLDINGS

1. The Magistrate Judge properly declined to consider Plaintiff's purported February 2025 declaration because it was not filed or presented to the court and was untimely, and properly determined that the August 2021 documents were not a proper factual declaration and did not contain specific factual testimony concerning the underlying incident.
2. Eleventh Amendment immunity applies to Plaintiff's claims against the South Carolina Department of Corrections and against the individual Defendants in their official capacities.
3. Because Plaintiff was a convicted prisoner in custody when the alleged events occurred, his claims concerning physical harm by inmates and prison officials' failure to protect him are properly analyzed under the Eighth Amendment rather than the Fourteenth Amendment.
4. Plaintiff did not present sufficient evidence to establish that any Defendant had specific knowledge of a substantial risk of harm to Plaintiff, and therefore his evidence did not satisfy the subjective component of his § 1983 failure-to-protect claim.
5. General, conclusory objections that merely reassert prior arguments or express disagreement with the Magistrate Judge's conclusions do not require correction of the Report and Recommendation; unobjected-to or inadequately objected-to portions are reviewed for clear error.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The recommendation has no presumptive weight, and the responsibility to make a final determination remains with the Court.” (Section II)

“An objection is specific if it ‘enables the district judge to focus attention on those issues—factual and legal—that are at the heart of the parties’ dispute.’” (Section II)

“A specific objection must “direct the court to a specific error in the magistrate’s proposed findings and recommendations.”” (Section II)

“After a thorough review of the Report, the applicable law, and the record of this case, the Court finds no clear error in the Report.” (Section IV)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff alleged that on February 16, 2021, Defendant Sergeant Thomas unlocked his cell door, permitting unidentified inmates to enter and attack him, resulting in a broken jaw. Plaintiff also alleged that Defendants failed to provide timely medical assistance after the attack. In opposing summary judgment, Plaintiff relied on documents that were either not filed, untimely, unrelated to this action, or lacked specific sworn factual testimony regarding the incident.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The action was referred to a Magistrate Judge under 28 U.S.C. § 636(b) and Local Civil Rule 73.02(B)(2) for pretrial proceedings. The Magistrate Judge recommended denying Plaintiff's motions and granting Defendants' motions for summary judgment. Plaintiff filed objections and a reply; the district court overruled the objections, adopted the Report and Recommendation, denied Plaintiff's Motion for Directed Verdict, Motion for Declaratory Judgment, and Motion for Summary Judgment, and granted Defendants' motions for summary judgment.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Mathews v. Weber, 423 U.S. 261 (1976)
- Carniewski v. W. Virginia Bd. of Prob. & Parole, 974 F.2d 1330 (4th Cir. 1992)
- Camby v. Davis, 718 F.2d 198, 199 (4th Cir. 1983)
- Diamond v. Colonial Life & Acc. Ins. Co., 416 F.3d 310, 316 (4th Cir. 2005)
- Dunlap v. TM Trucking of the Carolinas, LLC, No. 0:15-cv-04009-JMC, 2017 WL 6345402, at *5 n.6 (D.S.C. Dec. 12, 2017)
- One Parcel of Real Prop. Known as 2121 E. 30th St., 73 F.3d 1057, 1059 (10th Cir. 1996)
- Workman v. Perry, No. 6:17-cv-00765-RBH, 2017 WL 4791150, at *1 (D.S.C. Oct. 23, 2017)
- Orpiano v. Johnson, 687 F.2d 44, 47 (4th Cir. 1982)
- Staley v. Norton, No. 9:07-0288-PMD, 2007 WL 821181, at *1 (D.S.C. Mar. 2, 2007)

- Howard v. Secretary of Health and Human Services, 932 F.2d 505, 509 (6th Cir. 1991)
- Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007)
- Shelley v. Stirling, No. 4:18-CV-2259-JFA-TER, 2019 WL 3296970, at *5 (D.S.C. July 23, 2019)
- Pressly v. Hutto, 816 F.2d 977, 979 (4th Cir. 1987)

OPINION

Stoudemire

PER CURIAM.

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Hazel Stoudemire, Sr., C/A No. 2:24-cv-124-JFA-MGB Plaintiff, vs.

OPINION AND ORDER

Sergeant Thomas; Lieutenant Priester; Captain Livingston; Bryan Stirling; and South Carolina Department of Corrections, Defendants.

I. INTRODUCTION

Plaintiff Hazel Stoudemire, Sr. (“Plaintiff”), proceeding pro se and in forma pauperis, brings this action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and the South Carolina Tort Claims Act (“SCTCA”) alleging that Defendants failed to protect him and failed to provide him with adequate medical care while he was incarcerated at Broad River Correctional Institution (“Broad River”). In accordance with 28 U.S.C. § 636(b) and Local Civil Rule 73.02(B)(2) (D.S.C.), the case was referred to the Magistrate Judge for pretrial proceedings. Specifically, the Magistrate Judge conducted an initial review of Plaintiff’s Motion for Summary Judgment (ECF No. 86); Defendant Captain Livingston’s Motion for Summary Judgment (ECF No. 97); a Motion for Summary Judgment filed by Defendants Priester, South Carolina Department of Corrections (“SCDC”), Bryan Stirling, and Thomas (ECF No. 99); Plaintiff’s Motion for Directed Verdict (ECF No. 105); and Plaintiff’s “Motion for Declaratory Judgment Act, 28 U.S.C. § 2201” (ECF No. 115). After reviewing each dispositive motion, the Magistrate Judge assigned to this action prepared a thorough Report and Recommendation (“Report”), which opines that Plaintiff’s motions be denied, and Defendants’ motions be granted. (ECF No. 116). The Report sets forth, in detail, the relevant facts and standards of law on this matter, and this Court incorporates those facts and standards without a recitation. Plaintiff filed objections (ECF Nos. 118 & 119) to which the Defendants responded (ECF No. 128 & 129). Plaintiff also filed a reply to Defendants’ responses which reiterated those arguments within his objections¹. (ECF No. 133-1). Thus, this matter is ripe for review.

II. STANDARD OF REVIEW

The Magistrate Judge makes only a recommendation to this Court. The recommendation has no presumptive weight, and the responsibility to make a final determination remains with the Court. Mathews v. Weber, 423 U.S. 261 (1976). A district court is only required to conduct a de novo review of the specific portions of the Magistrate Judge’s Report to which an objection is made.

See 28 U.S.C. § 636(b); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b); *Carniewski v. W. Virginia Bd. of Prob. & Parole*, 974 F.2d 1330 (4th Cir. 1992). In the absence of specific objections to portions of the Magistrate's Report, this Court is not required to give an explanation for adopting the recommendation. See *Camby v. Davis*, 718 F.2d 1 (4th Cir. 1983). This document was filed alongside a request for extension of time to reply to Defendants' responses. (ECF No. 133). That motion is granted to the extent it requests the court consider the attached reply despite its untimely filing. To the extent this motion requests additional time to file additional replies, such request is denied as Plaintiff has failed to show good cause for the extension. Moreover, Plaintiff was specifically warned no further extensions would be granted. (ECF No. 131). *F.2d 198, 199* (4th Cir. 1983). Thus, the Court must only review those portions of the Report to which Petitioner has made a specific written objection. *Diamond v. Colonial Life & Acc. Ins. Co.*, 416 F.3d 310, 316 (4th Cir. 2005). "An objection is specific if it 'enables the district judge to focus attention on those issues—factual and legal—that are at the heart of the parties' dispute.'" *Dunlap v. TM Trucking of the Carolinas, LLC*, No. 0:15-cv-04009-JMC, 2017 WL 6345402, at *5 n.6 (D.S.C. Dec. 12, 2017) (citing *One Parcel of Real Prop. Known as 2121 E. 30th St.*, 73 F.3d 1057, 1059 (10th Cir. 1996)). A specific objection to the Magistrate Judge's Report thus requires more than a reassertion of arguments from the complaint or a mere citation to legal authorities. See *Workman v. Perry*, No. 6:17-cv-00765-RBH, 2017 WL 4791150, at *1 (D.S.C. Oct. 23, 2017). A specific objection must "direct the court to a specific error in the magistrate's proposed findings and recommendations." *Orpiano v. Johnson*, 687 F.2d 44, 47 (4th Cir. 1982). "Generally stated, nonspecific objections have the same effect as would a failure to object." *Staley v. Norton*, No. 9:07-0288-PMD, 2007 WL 821181, at *1 (D.S.C. Mar. 2, 2007) (citing *Howard v. Secretary of Health and Human Services*, 932 F.2d 505, 509 (6th Cir. 1991)). The Court reviews portions "not objected to—including those portions to which only 'general and conclusory' objections have been made—for clear error." *Id.* (citing *Diamond*, 416 F.3d at 315; *Camby*, 718 F.2d at 200; *Orpiano*, 687 F.2d at 47) (emphasis added). The legal standard employed in a motion for summary judgment is well-settled and correctly stated within the Report. Accordingly, that standard is incorporated herein without a recitation. Because Plaintiff is representing himself, these standards must be applied while liberally construing his filings in this case. See *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007).

III. DISCUSSION

As stated above, the relevant facts and standards of law on this matter are incorporated from the Report and therefore a full recitation is unnecessary here. (ECF No. 116). In short, Plaintiff alleges that, on February 16, 2021, Defendant Thomas unlocked Plaintiff's cell door which allowed an unidentified group of inmates to enter Plaintiff's cell and attack him, ultimately resulting in Plaintiff receiving a broken jaw. Plaintiff further alleges all Defendants subsequently failed to provide timely medical assistance for his injuries. In response to the Report, Plaintiff filed two sets of objections (ECF Nos. 118 & 119) along with a reply to Defendants' response (ECF No. 133). When liberally construed, the court has discerned four separate specific objections to the Report.

Although most of these objections appear to be mere disagreements with the Magistrate Judge's conclusions supported by a rehashing of those arguments previously presented, the court will nevertheless address each argument below. First Objection Within his first objection, Plaintiff challenges the Magistrate Judge's conclusion that Plaintiff failed to provide evidence via a verified complaint or proper affidavit to support his allegations. Plaintiff initially takes issue with the determination that his Amended Complaint was not verified and therefore cannot be used in support or in opposition of summary judgment. Plaintiff points to a summary judgment motion "signed, sworn, and submitted under penalty of perjury on August 16, 2021, that he filed in his response to Defendant's Reply to their August 28, 2025, motion" (August 2021 Document). (ECF No. 118, p. 1). It appears Plaintiff actually filed this alongside his response in support of his own summary judgment motion. (See ECF No. 113-1). However, it does not appear that the August 2021 Document actually contains sworn statements regarding the facts of this case. See *id.* Further, "Plaintiff contends that he submitted a declaration as well on February 27, 2025, that he attached with the motion for discovery sanction, including motion for default judgment and a request for admission" (February 2025 Document). (ECF No. 118, p. 1). As to the February 2025 Document, Plaintiff's assertion that this document was previously filed with the Court is not supported by the record. The docket does not show any such document was filed and it does not appear that Plaintiff filed the February 2025 Document with the Court in his most recent filing. Plaintiff has offered no explanation as to why he has failed to file this document with the Court, nor has he offered an explanation as to why he did not cite to these declarations in any of his prior briefs.² Given the untimeliness of Plaintiff's reliance on the February 2025 Document and the lack of 2 Plaintiff avers that this document was sent to opposing counsel at some point in this litigation. Regardless, the document has still not been filed or presented to the court. Accordingly, the Magistrate Judge did not err in failing to consider a document never presented. explanation as to why it has not been filed, outside of Plaintiff's unsworn and self-serving assertion it was previously filed, the Magistrate Judge did not err in failing to utilize such a document when deciding Defendants' motion for summary judgment. *Shelley v. Stirling*, No. 4:18-CV-2259-JFA-TER, 2019 WL 3296970, at *5 (D.S.C. July 23, 2019) (finding affidavits submitted after the issuance of a Report and Recommendation untimely and thus refusing to consider them in deciding summary judgment). Moreover, the August 2021 Document is not a proper factual declaration, nor does it contain facts which would warrant the denial of Defendants' motion for summary judgment. The August 2021 Document appears to be comprised of three separate documents related to a 2021 lawsuit filed by Plaintiff: an August 16, 2021, cover letter to defense counsel; a declaration regarding service; and a petition for summary judgment. (ECF No. 113-1). Plaintiff appears to contend that the declaration somehow prospectively verifies the complaint in this present action or verifies Plaintiff's motion for summary judgment, therefore constituting testimony which may be considered on summary judgment. This contention is belied by a review of the August 2021 Document. First, according to Plaintiff's own assertions, the August 2021

Document was created years before Plaintiff commenced this lawsuit. Accordingly, it cannot be used to verify the later allegations put forth in the present complaint. More importantly, however, the declaration contained in the August 2021 Document does not actually appear to verify any statements other than the statements contained in the document itself, which does not contain any factual testimony regarding the underlying incident of this lawsuit. The declaration is made in relation to a certificate of service and does not purport to verify the contents of Plaintiff's 2021 motion for summary judgment as Plaintiff contends. Accordingly, The Magistrate Judge correctly declined to consider such a filing. Moreover, even if the Court were to accept Plaintiff's 2021 summary judgment petition as verified fact testimony, the contents of that motion would not warrant a denial of Defendants' summary judgment motion, because it contains no specific factual testimony regarding the underlying incident. (See ECF No. 113-1). This document only makes conclusory statements and legal conclusions and generally asks the Court for relief. Such allegations fall far short of the type of testimony Plaintiff would need to support his claim past Defendants' motion for summary judgment. Accordingly, even if the Court were to accept Plaintiff's 2021 summary judgment motion as testimony, the result would remain unchanged. Consequently, Plaintiff's first objection is overruled.

Second Objection Within his second objection, Plaintiff takes issue with the Report's application of Eleventh Amendment immunity to certain claims. Specifically, Plaintiff states that Defendants have waived Eleventh Amendment immunity and that the state-law immunity found in the South Carolina Tort Claims Act does not apply to Plaintiff's constitutional claims. (ECF No. 118, p. 2). Further, Plaintiff "contends that under the state-created danger doctrine, [these Defendants] violated due process in their misconduct[.]" Id. Plaintiff further appears to object that the Court erred "in not addressing or adjudicating Plaintiff's Fourteenth Amendment claims in their individual capacities[.]" Id. As to all of these objections, Plaintiff has failed to cite any authority in support of his assertions. A review of the Report shows that the Magistrate Judge correctly applied Eleventh Amendment immunity to Plaintiff's claims against SCDC and these Defendants in their official capacity. Further, the Report correctly held that Plaintiff's claims are properly analyzed pursuant to the Eighth Amendment, as opposed to the Fourteenth Amendment, given that Plaintiff is a convicted prisoner who was in custody at the time of the events in question. *Pressly v. Hutto*, 816 F.2d 977, 979 (4th Cir.1987)("Constitutional claims of convicted prison inmates that they have suffered physical harm at the hands either of prison officials or of fellow-inmates against whom prison officials failed to provide protection, are most appropriately assessed under the eighth amendment...."). Finally, Plaintiff has offered no argument or authority which would support application of the state- created danger doctrine which appears to be a subset of Plaintiff's improper Fourteenth Amendment claims. As such, Plaintiff's objections are improper and overruled.

Third Objection Plaintiff's third objection avers that the Magistrate Judge should have found that the Plaintiff submitted evidence that satisfies the subjective prong of the § 1983 failure to protect analysis. (ECF No. 118, p. 3). Specifically, Plaintiff states "[t]he fact that the unit was

already under lockdown establishes that a dangerous condition existed before Thomas popped the cell door.” Id. Further, Plaintiff puts forth an order from an unrelated case which Plaintiff states shows Defendants disregarded a substantial risk of harm. Id. As stated above, Plaintiff’s declaration testimony was not filed for the Court’s consideration on summary judgment and, even if accepted, would not serve to prove that any Defendant had any knowledge of potential harm specifically as to the Plaintiff. Similarly, the order referenced by Plaintiff is from an entirely different case with different parties and is not proper testimony on which the Court may rely for evidentiary purposes, nor would it provide any evidence that could satisfy the subjective prong of the Court’s analysis. In sum, though Plaintiff generally states that Defendants had inmates out of their cells, these allegations are unsworn and, even if taken as true, do not provide a sufficient factual basis for the Court to determine that any Defendant had specific knowledge of a risk of harm to Plaintiff. Accordingly, Plaintiff’s objection is overruled. Fourth Objection Finally, Plaintiff goes on at length taking issue with the Court’s substantive analysis of his claims. However, Plaintiff appears to make only general objections regarding his disagreement with the Magistrate Judge’s recommendation, citing only the previously discussed declarations and unrelated order in support of his arguments. Plaintiff’s continued reliance on the late declarations and unrelated order are misplaced and do not support his argument that the Report ought not be adopted. Plaintiff’s amended objections are likewise conclusory and unsupported by argument or evidence. (See ECF No. 119). In all, Plaintiff has failed to point to any error in the Report’s substantive analysis which would warrant correction. Accordingly, Plaintiff’s objections are overruled.

IV. CONCLUSION

After a thorough review of the Report, the applicable law, and the record of this case, the Court finds no clear error in the Report. After a de novo review of each part of the Report to which Plaintiff specifically objected, the Court hereby adopts the Report and Recommendation. (ECF No. 116). For the reasons discussed above and in the Report, Plaintiff’s Motion for Directed Verdict (ECF No. 105) is denied; Plaintiff’s “Motion for Declaratory Judgment Act, 28 U.S.C. § 2201” (ECF No. 115) is denied; Plaintiff’s Motion for Summary Judgment (ECF No. 86) is denied; and Defendants’ Motions for Summary Judgment (ECF Nos. 97 & 99) are granted. IT IS SO ORDERED. March 2, 2026 Joseph F. Anderson, Jr. Columbia, South Carolina United States District Judge 10