

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

Hodge v. Williams

343 F. App'x 979 (5th Cir. 2009) · Decided September 14, 2009

SUMMARY

The Fifth Circuit affirmed the dismissal with prejudice of Marcus Hodge’s 42 U.S.C. § 1983 failure-to-protect claim against Officer Williams. The court held that Hodge’s allegations did not establish deliberate indifference and did not support an award of punitive damages.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Per curiam
JURISDICTION	Federal
DECIDED	September 14, 2009
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Hodge appealed the dismissal with prejudice of his 42 U.S.C. § 1983 failure-to-protect action following screening under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	De novo review of the district court's dismissal for failure to state a claim following screening under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unpublished and nonprecedential under Fifth Circuit Rule 47.5, subject to limited citation circumstances under Rule 47.5.4.
PARTIES	Marcus Hodge v. Officer Williams

TOPICS

- prisoners rights
- section 1983
- civil rights
- motions to dismiss
- damages

PRACTICE AREAS

- Civil rights litigation
- Prisoner litigation
- Federal appellate procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Hodge alleged facts sufficient to show that Officer Williams was deliberately indifferent to a substantial risk of harm from another prisoner.

2. Whether Hodge alleged facts sufficient to support an award of punitive damages against Officer Williams.

HOLDINGS

1. Hodge failed to allege facts sufficient to support a finding that Officer Williams was deliberately indifferent to the risk posed by Ware; Williams's ineffectual handling of the situation did not amount to deliberate indifference.
2. Hodge failed to allege facts sufficient to support recovery of punitive damages against Williams.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“While Williams’s handling of the situation by talking to Ware ultimately was ineffectual, Hodge’s allegations do not support a finding that it was deliberately indifferent.” (981)

“The district court’s judgment is AFFIRMED.” (981)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Hodge told Officer Williams that another prisoner, Deryl Ware, had threatened to fight him if he continued praying. Williams allegedly responded that no one could prevent Hodge from praying and said he would look into the matter. After Hodge returned from visitation, Ware allegedly confronted and assaulted him, causing cuts to his hand and lip and a sore neck, although Hodge reported no continuing injuries. Hodge was later disciplined for fighting and reckless conduct and sued Williams for deliberate indifference and failure to protect.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Hodge sued Officer Williams, alleging that Williams was deliberately indifferent to a threat by another prisoner, Deryl Ware. The district court requested a more definite statement, screened the amended allegations under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, concluded that Hodge failed to state a claim, and dismissed the action with prejudice. The district court also alternatively concluded that Hodge alleged only de minimis injuries. The Fifth Circuit affirmed on the deliberate-indifference ground and did not reach the alternative injury ground.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Davidson v. Cannon, 474 U.S. 344, 106 S. Ct. 668, 88 L. Ed. 2d 677 (1986)
- Smith v. Wade, 461 U.S. 30, 103 S. Ct. 1625, 75 L. Ed. 2d 632 (1983)

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

PER CURIAM: * Inmate Marcus Hodge appeals the district court's dismissal with prejudice under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915A and 1915e of his lawsuit against Officer Williams under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. We AFFIRM. Hodge contends that he advised Officer Williams that another prisoner, Deryl Ware, "said I couldn't pray no more and if I did we would fight." According to Hodge, Williams stated that no one could keep him from praying, and he would look into it.

Hodge then went to a visitation. Upon his return, Ware allegedly confronted him, saying Williams had advised Ware of Hodge's complaint. Ware then assaulted Hodge, who alleges that he suffered cuts on his hand, a cut lip, and a sore neck, though he says he has no continuing injuries. Through the prison discipline system, Hodge was ultimately found guilty of disciplinary violations of fighting and reckless conduct arising from the fight and received a sanction of "15 days no visitation." His grievance against Williams was denied.

Hodge filed a § 1983 action against Officer Williams alleging that he failed to protect Hodge from Ware and was deliberately indifferent in doing so. The district court requested a more definite statement, and Hodge responded.

The district court then conducted a screening under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A. The court concluded that Hodge's allegations failed to state a claim for which relief could be granted, and dismissed under § 1915A(b)(1). Although the court found that Ware's threat to Hodge constituted a substantial risk of harm, it found insufficient allegation of facts to support Hodge's contention that Williams was deliberately indifferent to that risk.

Alternatively, the court found that only de minimis injuries were alleged and dismissed on that ground as well.¹ On appeal, Hodge contends that Williams failed to follow policy in how he handled Hodge's allegations. He abandons his claim for compensatory damages, stating "Mr. Hodge is only seeking punitive damages." Hodge argues that *Davidson v. Cannon*, 474 U.S. 344, 106 S.Ct.

668, 88 L.Ed.2d 677 (1986), supports his appeal. After reviewing the record, we agree with the district court that Hodge has failed to allege facts sufficient to support a finding of deliberate indifference. See *id.* at 347-48, 106 S.Ct. 668 ("Respondents' lack of due care in this case led to serious injury, but that lack of care simply does not approach the sort of abusive government conduct that the Due Process Clause was designed to prevent.") While Williams's handling of the situation by talking to Ware ultimately was ineffectual, *981Hodge's allegations do not support a finding that it was deliberately indifferent.

Hodge has not alleged facts sufficient to support recovery of punitive damages against Williams. See *Smith v. Wade*, 461 U.S. 30, 103 S.Ct. 1625, 75 L.Ed.2d 632 (1983). The district court's judgment is AFFIRMED. Pursuant to 5th Cir. R. 47.5, the court has determined that this opinion

should not be published and is not precedent except under the limited circumstances set forth in 5th Cir.

R. 47.5.4.. Because we affirm on the first ground, we need not reach the alternative ground.