

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Barnaba v. County of San Diego

Barnaba · No. 23-cv-01622-AJB-SBC · Decided July 24, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Southern District of California partially granted and partially denied Defendants’ motion to dismiss the Second Amended Complaint. The court dismissed several individual defendants without prejudice because Plaintiffs added them rather than substituting them for previously unidentified Doe defendants, but allowed Plaintiff A.N.Y.’s claim for interference with familial association to proceed. The court permitted Plaintiffs to substitute the dismissed defendants for Doe defendants or seek leave to add them under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 15.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Southern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Anthony J. Battaglia
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Southern District of California
DECIDED	July 24, 2025
DOCKET	23-cv-01622-AJB-SBC
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendants moved under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6) to dismiss portions of Plaintiffs' Second Amended Complaint. The court granted the motion in part, dismissing five individual defendants without prejudice, and denied it in part as to Plaintiff A.N.Y.'s interference-with-familial-association claim.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	On a Rule 12(b)(6) motion, the court tests the legal sufficiency of the complaint, assumes the truth of well-pleaded factual allegations, and construes them in the light most favorable to the plaintiff. Legal conclusions and conclusory recitations of claim elements are not entitled to that assumption.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unknown

TOPICS

- motions to dismiss
- motion to amend
- pleadings
- civil procedure
- due process

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

civil rights

constitutional law

municipal liability

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Plaintiffs improperly added six individual defendants to the Second Amended Complaint without substituting them for Doe defendants or obtaining consent or leave to amend.
2. Whether Plaintiff A.N.Y. sufficiently alleged a constitutionally protected parent-child relationship to state a claim for interference with familial association under the Fourteenth Amendment.

HOLDINGS

1. Plaintiffs impermissibly added the individual defendants as new defendants rather than substituting them for Doe defendants, and because Plaintiffs did not obtain consent or leave to amend to add new defendants, the individual defendants were dismissed without prejudice.
2. A.N.Y.'s allegations that he was very close with his father, enjoyed his love and company, and visited his father's home multiple times per week were sufficient at the pleading stage to support a reasonable inference of consistent involvement in his father's life and participation in child-rearing activities, and therefore stated a claim for interference with familial association.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Accordingly, because Plaintiffs did not seek, and were not granted, leave to amend the complaint to add new defendants, the Court DISMISSES the Individual Defendants from the SAC. The dismissal is WITHOUT PREJUDICE” (Discussion § III.A)

“Accepting these facts as true and construing them the light most favorable to Plaintiff A.N.Y., the Court finds it reasonable to infer that the amount and quality of time the minor spent at his father’s home amount to “consistent involvement in a child’s life and participation in child-rearing activities” that merit constitutional protection.” (Discussion § III.B)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Chaz Guy Young-Villasenor died on May 5, 2022, while incarcerated as a pretrial detainee at the San Diego County Central Jail, allegedly from an overdose of methamphetamine and/or fentanyl. Plaintiffs asserted federal civil-rights claims and state-law claims for wrongful death, negligence, and failure to provide immediate medical care. Plaintiff A.N.Y. alleged that he was very close with his father, enjoyed his love and company, and visited him multiple times per week at his father's home.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiffs filed a Second Amended Complaint after the court previously granted in part and denied in part a motion to dismiss the First Amended Complaint. The prior order permitted Plaintiffs to identify certain Doe defendants and amend their familial-relationship claim. Defendants challenged Plaintiffs' addition of individual defendants and the sufficiency of A.N.Y.'s amended familial-association allegations. The court dismissed the individual defendants without prejudice but sustained A.N.Y.'s claim.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Navarro v. Block, 250 F.3d 729, 731 (9th Cir. 2001)
- Cahill v. Liberty Mutual Insurance Co., 80 F.3d 336, 337-38 (9th Cir. 1996)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678-79 (2009)
- Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007)
- Wheeler v. City of Santa Clara, 894 F.3d 1046, 1057-58 (9th Cir. 2018)
- Lehr v. Robertson, 436 U.S. 248, 256-58 (1983)

OPINION

Barnaba v. County of San Diego

PER CURIAM.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

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SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

10 11 ALEXIS ANN BARNABA, as guardian Case No.: 23-cv-01622-AJB-SBC ad litem for
minor child and successor-in 12 -interest A.N.Y.; and YVETTE YOUNG, ORDER GRANTING
IN PART AND

13 DENYING IN PART DEFENDANTS’

Plaintiffs, MOTION TO DISMISS THE 14

SECOND AMENDED COMPLAINT

15 v. (Doc. No. 32) 16 COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO, et al., 17 Defendants. 18 19 20 Before the
Court is a motion to dismiss Plaintiffs Alexis Ann Barnaba, as guardian 21 ad litem for minor child
and successor-in-interest A.N.Y., and Yvette Young’s 22 (collectively, “Plaintiffs”) Second
Amended Complaint (“SAC”) filed by the County of 23 San Diego (“the County”), Anthony Ray,
Kelly Martinez, Theresa Adams-Hydar, William 24 Gore, and Erika Frierson’s (“Individual
Defendants”) (collectively, “Defendants”). (Doc.

25 No. 32.) The motion is fully briefed. (Doc. Nos. 40, 41.)

26 I. BACKGROUND

27 This case arises out of the death of Chaz Guy Young-Villasenor (“Decedent”) while 28
incarcerated as a pretrial detainee at the San Diego County Central Jail. (SAC, Doc. No. 1 26 at ¶
7.) There, on May 5, 2022, Decedent died of “an overdose of . . . methamphetamine 2 and/or
fentanyl[.]” (Id. ¶ 34.) Plaintiffs sued alleging causes of action for violations of 3 federal civil
rights, as well as state law claims for wrongful death, negligence, and failure 4 to provide

immediate medical care. 5 The operative complaint is the SAC, which Plaintiffs filed after the Court's Order 6 granting in part and denying in part a motion to dismiss their First Amended Complaint 7 ("FAC"). Relevant here, in that Order, the Court directed Plaintiffs to file an amended 8 complaint identifying those "Does 7 through 10" who are readily identifiable. (Doc. No. 9 24 at 17.) The Court also granted the motion to dismiss Plaintiffs' civil rights claim for 10 interference of familial relationship but permitted them leave to amend. (Id. at 11.) The 11 instant motion to dismiss challenges Plaintiffs' amendments concerning these two 12 deficiencies. (Doc. No. 32-1 at 5–10.) This Order follows.

13 II. LEGAL STANDARD

14 A motion to dismiss under Rule 12(b)(6) tests the legal sufficiency of the claims 15 asserted in the complaint. *Navarro v. Block*, 250 F.3d 729, 731 (9th Cir. 2001). To 16 determine the sufficiency of the complaint, the court must assume the truth of all factual 17 allegations and construe them in the light most favorable to the plaintiff. *Cahill v. Liberty 18 Mut. Ins. Co.*, 80 F.3d 336, 337–38 (9th Cir. 1996). This tenet, however, does not apply to 19 legal conclusions. *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009). "Threadbare recitals of the 20 elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice." 21 Id.; *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007). Plausibility demands more 22 than a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action or naked assertions devoid 23 of further factual enhancement. *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678. "[W]here the well-pleaded facts do 24 not permit the court to infer more than the mere possibility of misconduct," the complaint 25 is subject to dismissal. Id. at 679.

26 III. DISCUSSION

27 Defendants argue that the Individual Defendants must be dismissed because they 28 have been added to the SAC as "distinct entities and not 'Does'" and that the SAC "still 1 fails to articulate sufficient facts to substantiate a claim for loss of familial relationship for 2 plaintiff A.N.Y." (Doc. No. 32-1 at 5, 10.) As more fully explained below, the Court agrees 3 with the former but disagrees with the latter. 4 A. Improper Addition of Defendants 5 Defendants contend that Plaintiffs impermissibly added the Individual Defendants 6 to their SAC because they were not substituted for any of the ten unidentified "Does," but 7 rather, added as new defendants. (Id. at 5.) 8 A party may amend a pleading once as a matter of course and thereafter only by 9 consent of the opposing party or by leave of the court. Fed. R. Civ. P. 15(a)(2). 10 Here, Plaintiffs assert that they "clearly added the names of RAY, MARTINEZ, 11 ADAMS-HYDAR, GORE, BARNETT, and FRIERSON in response to this Court's order 12 for Plaintiffs to 'file a timely amended complaint naming . . . Doe Defendants.'" (Doc. No. 13 40 at 8.) This argument, however, is belied by the plain language of their SAC. As 14 explained in the Court's prior Order, Plaintiffs alleged in their FAC that "Does 7 through 15 10 'are supervisors and policy-making officials,' including various Sheriff's Department 16 employees, supervisory personnel employed by the County, members of the Board of 17 Supervisors, and other County officials." (Doc. No. 24 at 17 (quoting the FAC at ¶ 10).) 18 Because several of these Doe Defendants "are readily identifiable," the Court ordered 19

Plaintiffs to name them in an amended complaint. (Id.) That is not what Plaintiffs did. 20 Although the Individual Defendants that Plaintiffs named are current and former 21 Sheriff's Department employees (and would thus fit the category of defendants described 22 as Does 7 through 10), they pled in multiple paragraphs that the Individual Defendants "as 23 well as Defendants DOES 7 through 10" are liable for the alleged wrongdoings. (SAC at 24 ¶¶ Paragraphs 20, 142–45, 169, 170–74, 209, 213–14, 217, 233 (emphasis added).) The 25 SAC thus makes clear that instead of substituting the six1 newly named defendants for the 26 Doe Defendants, Plaintiffs added them. Based on the SAC, as currently pled, the Court 27 28 1 As an additional defect, the Court notes that Does 7 through 10 comprise only four unnamed 1 rejects Plaintiffs' contention that their addition of the Individual Defendants was permitted 2 by the Court's prior Order. Accordingly, because Plaintiffs did not seek, and were not 3 granted, leave to amend the complaint to add new defendants, the Court DISMISSES the 4 Individual Defendants from the SAC. The dismissal is WITHOUT PREJUDICE to 5 Plaintiffs substituting them for Doe Defendants consistent with the Court's prior Order or 6 seeking to amend the complaint to add them with Defendants' consent or the Court's leave 7 under Federal Rules of Civil Procedure 15(a). 8 As the Court dismisses the Individual Defendants from the SAC, the Court need not 9 and does not consider the additional arguments in their motion to dismiss. As a final point, 10 the Court notes that the technical defect identified could very well have been addressed by 11 the parties without the need for court intervention. See Fed. R. Civ. P. 15(a). Counsel are 12 reminded that although litigation is inherently adversarial, "the experience does not have 13 to, and should not, be antagonistic or hostile." Local Civ. Rule 2.1(a)(1). As with all 14 attorneys, the Court expects counsel in this case "to honor and maintain the integrity of our 15 justice system" and "to attempt to resolve disputes promptly, fairly and reasonably, with 16 resort to the court for judicial relief only if necessary." Id. 2.1(a)(2). 17 B. Interference with Familial Relationship 18 Next, Defendants argues that Plaintiff A.N.Y.'s allegations to his claim for 19 interference with familial relationship remain insufficiently pled. 20 "A decedent's parents and children generally have the right to assert substantive due 21 process claims under the Fourteenth Amendment." *Wheeler v. City of Santa Clara*, 894 22 F.3d 1046, 1057 (9th Cir. 2018) (citations omitted). "In the context of parent-child 23 relationships specifically, the Supreme Court has emphasized that the rights of parents are 24 a counterpart of the responsibilities they have assumed: 'the mere existence of a biological 25 link does not merit equivalent constitutional protection.'" Id. at 1058 (quoting *Lehr v. 26 Robertson*, 436 U.S. 248, 256–58 (1983)). Rather, to merit constitutional protection, "even 27 biological parents must maintain consistent involvement in a child's life and participation 28 in child-rearing activities[.]" Id. 1 Here, Plaintiffs amended the SAC to allege that: "Prior to Mr. VILLASENOR's 2 death Plaintiff A.N.Y. was very close with his father and enjoyed his love and company. 3 ¶A.N.Y. would visit with Mr. VILLASENOR multiple times per week at Mr. 4 ¶ VILLASENOR's home." (SAC at 9 58.) Accepting these facts as true and construing them 5 the light most favorable to Plaintiff A.N.Y., the Court finds it reasonable to infer that the 6 }amount and quality of time the

minor spent at his father's home amount to "consistent 7 | involvement in a child's life and participation in child-rearing activities" that merit 8 || constitutional protection. *Wheeler v. City of Santa Clara*, 894 F.3d at 1058. Thus, the Court 9 || DENIES Defendants' motion to dismiss Plaintiff A.N.Y.'s claim for interference with 10 || familial association.

11 CONCLUSION

12 For the reasons stated herein, the Court GRANTS IN PART and DENIES IN 13 ||}PART Defendants' motion to dismiss. (Doc. No. 32.) Accordingly, it is HEREBY 14 ||] ORDERED that Anthony Ray, Kelly Martinez, Theresa Adams-Hydar, William Gore, and 15 || Erika Frierson are DISMISSED WITHOUT PREJUDICE," and Plaintiff A.N.Y.'s claim 16 || for interference with familial association is SUSTAINED. 17 Any amended complaint or motion for leave to file an amended complaint consistent 18 || with this Order must be filed no later than July 31, 2025. Defendants' responsive pleading 19 || must be filed no later than August 14, 2024. 20 IT IS SO ORDERED. 21 Dated: July 24, 2025 22 Hon. Anthony J.Battaglia 23 United States District Judge 24 25 || _____- 2 Mike Barrett is also an individual defendant named in this action, but he is represented by separate 26 || counsel and has filed a motion to dismiss on other grounds. (Doc. Nos. 32-1 at 2 n.1; 42.) Because Mr. 07 Barrett does not raise the issue of being improperly added as a defendant under Federal Rules of Civil Procedure 15 or the Court's prior Order, he has waived it. See Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(h). This Order, therefore, 28 applies only to the Individual Defendants who brought the motion at issue here. Mr. Barrett's separate motion to dismiss remains pending. (Doc. No. 42.) &