

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

Sauls v. Balli

Sauls · No. 22-cv-06739-WHO (PR) · Decided February 24, 2025

SUMMARY

The court denied defendants’ Rule 12(b)(6) motion to dismiss Eighth Amendment endangerment claims brought by David L. Sauls against S. Balli and J. Crews. The court held that allegations that defendants labeled Sauls a snitch, encouraged threats or attacks by other prisoners, and that Sauls was subsequently threatened were sufficient to state a claim. All other claims and defendants were dismissed, and the court set a schedule for a possible summary judgment motion.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	William H. Orrick
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of California
DECIDED	February 24, 2025
DOCKET	22-cv-06739-WHO (PR)
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendants moved under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6) to dismiss the third amended complaint in a prisoner civil-rights action alleging that prison officials endangered plaintiff by labeling him a snitch.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	On a Rule 12(b)(6) motion, dismissal is appropriate when the complaint does not allege enough facts to state a facially plausible claim, lacks a cognizable legal theory, lacks sufficient facts under a cognizable theory, or establishes an affirmative defense from the complaint itself. The court assumed the factual allegations to be true for purposes of the motion.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished
PARTIES	S. Balli, et al. v. David L. Sauls

TOPICS

motions to dismiss

prisoners rights

cruel and unusual punishment

section 1983

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil rights

prisoner litigation

constitutional law

civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Sauls's allegations that defendants labeled him a snitch in front of other prisoners and thereby subjected him to threats stated an Eighth Amendment endangerment claim under Section 1983.
2. Whether alleged threats occurring outside the Northern District were sufficiently connected to the alleged labeling and endangerment acts occurring at CTF-Soledad to survive a Rule 12(b)(6) motion.
3. Whether claims and defendants not included among the cognizable Eighth Amendment endangerment claims should remain in the action.

HOLDINGS

1. A prisoner states a sufficient Eighth Amendment endangerment claim at the pleading stage by alleging that prison officials labeled him a snitch in front of other prisoners, encouraged prisoners to threaten or attack him, and that he was subsequently threatened by prisoners.
2. Alleged threats occurring outside the Northern District were sufficiently connected to the initiating labeling and endangerment acts at CTF-Soledad to survive a Rule 12(b)(6) motion.
3. Only the Eighth Amendment endangerment claims against Balli and Crews remained in the action; all other claims and defendants were dismissed, and defendants' first motion to dismiss was denied as moot.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Here, Sauls has alleged sufficient facts to state an Eighth Amendment endangerment claim.” (Discussion at 15-22)

“The only claims in this action are the Eighth Amendment endangerment claims against Balli and Crews. All other claims and defendants are DISMISSED.” (Conclusion at 24-26)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Sauls alleges that prison officials at CTF-Soledad and the Substance Abuse Treatment Facility labeled him a snitch in front of other prisoners and encouraged prisoners to threaten or attack him. He alleges that Balli and Crews recruited or conspired with inmates to harm him and that prison officials transferred a group of threatening inmates to the facility where Sauls was housed. Sauls was ultimately threatened by prisoners at the Substance Abuse Treatment Facility.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Sauls's original complaint asserted several claims, including COVID-related claims, grievance-related due-process claims, property-deprivation claims, and retaliation and endangerment claims. The court dismissed the original complaint with leave to amend, later dismissed the first amended complaint with leave to amend, and

allowed only cognizable Eighth Amendment endangerment claims to proceed against Balli and Crews. After Sauls filed a third amended complaint, defendants filed the motion addressed in this order; the court denied that motion, dismissed all other claims and defendants, and set a schedule for a possible summary-judgment motion.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007)
- Balistreri v. Pacifica Police Department, 901 F.2d 696, 699 (9th Cir. 1990)
- Scott v. Kuhlmann, 746 F.2d 1377, 1378 (9th Cir. 1984)
- Valandingham v. Bojorquez
- Green v. Chamberlain, No. 2:19-CV-0109-DMC-P, 2019 WL 3302346, at *7 (E.D. Cal. July 23, 2019)
- Morgan v. MacDonald, 41 F.3d 1291, 1294 (9th Cir. 1994)
- Brummett v. Lopez, Case No. 1:21-cv-00086-DAD-BAM (PC), 2021 WL 3722779, at *3

OPINION

Sauls v. Balli

PER CURIAM.

1 2 3 4 5

6 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

7 NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

8 9 DAVID L. SAULS, Case No. 22-cv-06739-WHO (PR) Plaintiff,

10 ORDER DENYING DEFENDANTS’

MOTION TO DISMISS; v. 11

ORDER SETTING BRIEFING

12 S. BALLI, et al., SCHEDULE 13 Defendants. Dkt. Nos. 24 and 28 14 15

INTRODUCTION

16 Plaintiff David L. Sauls alleges in this 42 U.S.C. § 1983 action that his jailors at 17 CTF-Soledad endangered him in violation of the Eighth Amendment by labelling him a 18 snitch. Defendants move to dismiss under Rule 12(b)(6) on grounds that Sauls has failed 19 to state a claim for relief. 20 Sauls has stated sufficient facts to survive a Rule 12(b)(6) motion to dismiss. 21 According to his allegations, which must be assumed as true for the purposes of this Order, 22 defendants at CTF-Soledad and SATF labelled him a snitch in front of other prisoners and 23 encouraged prisoners to threaten and attack him. He was ultimately threatened by 24 prisoners at SATF. Though the facts supporting the final element occurred outside the 25 26 1 Defendants’ first motion to dismiss is moot because they filed a second one while the 27 first was pending. It is the second motion that is the subject of this Order. (Dkt. Nos. 24 1 Northern District, I find them

sufficiently connected to the initiating acts at CTF-Soledad 2 to survive a Rule 12(b)(6) motion to dismiss. Accordingly, defendants' Rule 12(b)(6) 3 motion is DENIED. 4 On or before July 1, 2025, defendants shall file a motion for summary judgment 5 regarding the Eighth Amendment endangerment claims if they choose to do so. Sauls's 6 opposition shall be filed within 45 days after defendants' motion is filed. Defendants' 7 reply shall be filed within 15 days after the opposition is filed. The summary judgment 8 motion shall be deemed submitted on the day the reply brief is due.

9 BACKGROUND

10 i. Procedural Background 11 This Order concerns defendants' motion to dismiss Sauls's third amended 12 complaint. In his original complaint, Sauls claimed that unnamed defendants (i) violated 13 the Eighth Amendment by failing to protect prisoners from COVID; (ii) violated due 14 process by failing to respond to his emergency grievances regarding his medical condition; 15 (iii) negligently lost his emergency grievance; (iv) violated his First and Eighth 16 Amendments by calling him a snitch and by sending CTF-Soledad prisoners to Corcoran 17 State Prison after his transfer to Corcoran in order to place him in danger; and (v) 18 misplaced his television. (Order Dismissing Complaint, Dkt. No. 11 at 2-3.) 19 I dismissed the original complaint with leave to amend. His COVID claims were 20 generalized and conclusory; his grievance claims were dismissed because the prison 21 grievance procedure creates a procedural right that does not give rise to a protected liberty 22 interest that requires the procedural protections of Due Process Clause; his retaliation and 23 endangerment claims were dismissed with leave to amend because he failed to name the 24 actual persons who allegedly committed the acts; and his claim about the loss of his 25 television when he transferred prisons was dismissed because neither the negligent nor 26 intentional deprivation of property states a claim under section 1983 if the deprivation was 27 random and unauthorized. (Id. at 3-4.) 1 Sauls then filed a first amended complaint, which contained only his retaliation and 2 endangerment claims. I dismissed it with leave to amend because Sauls again failed to 3 name the actual persons involved. (Dkt. No. 17 at 2-3.) 4 His second amended complaint contained cognizable Eighth Amendment 5 endangerment claims. Sauls alleged that in 2020 Lieutenant S. Balli recruited, and 6 conspired with, prisoners to slander Sauls as a "snitch" and to do physical harm to him. 7 (Order of Service, Dkt. No. 21 at 2.) Sauls claims that Balli acted with the approval of his 8 supervisor, J. Crews. (Id.) I ordered service of the Eighth Amendment endangerment 9 claims only and dismissed the others. (Id. at 3.) I allowed him leave to amend his claim 10 against the warden, whose name he had not provided. (Id.) 11 Defendants filed a motion to dismiss the second amended complaint, but Sauls then 12 filed a third amended complaint, which mooted the motion. (Dkt. Nos. 24 and 28.) 13 Defendants then filed a second motion to dismiss, which is the subject of this Order. 14 (Dkt. Nos. 26 and 28.) 15 ii. Allegations in the Third Amended Complaint 16 Sauls alleges that "Defendants 'S. BALLI' and 'J. CREWS' are the inventors [sic] 17 of this cause of action [at CTF-Soledad] by calling plaintiff [on unspecified dates] a 18 'snitch' and defendant 'warden' knew of this allegation and failed to

reasonability [sic] . . . respond to abate.” (Third Am. Compl., Dkt. No. 26 at 11.) Sauls asserts that unnamed 20 custody staff “walked up and down the tiers telling other inmates that Plaintiff was a 21 ‘snitch.’ ” (Id.) He heard Balli tell “inmates of her race” that Sauls was a “threat to or 22 [sic] organization and must be eliminated.” (Id. at 12.) He also alleges that Crews 23 “willfully conspired et al. [sic] staff inmates to libelous slander of plaintiff[’s] name, with 24 character assassination by way of labelling plaintiff as a snitch within the inmate 25 population.” (Id. at 13.) 26 Sauls further states that after he was transferred to the Substance Abuse Treatment 27 Facility (SATF), prison authorities transferred a “posse” of inmates they had “recruited” 1 “were [sic] is that bato Sauls, we’re going to kill his fucking ass.” (Id. at 14.) He says also 2 that Balli came to SATF and told “inmates of her race” that “Sauls is a threat to are [sic] 3 organization, and must be eliminated.” (Id.) He also alleges that while at CTF, Crews 4 conspired with other staff and “inmates of her race to do plaintiff bodily harm.” (Id.) He 5 heard Crews talking with “inmates of her race” about the “size of the weapon to be used 6 for the job, and he also heard the “sound of metal during that conversation.” (Id.) Sauls 7 contends that Warden Koenig knew about his being labelled a snitch and threatened to “put 8 plaintiff back in the general population.” (Id. at 6.) 9 In addition to Sauls’s Eighth Amendment endangerment claims, he alleges that 10 defendants violated the Tom Bane Act, a California law, and repeats a conclusory claim 11 regarding COVID protections, which was dismissed in a prior Order. (Id. at 3, 6.)

12 STANDARD OF REVIEW

13 A motion to dismiss under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6) should be 14 granted if the complaint does not proffer “enough facts to state a claim for relief that is 15 plausible on its face.” *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007). 16 Dismissal is appropriate also when pleadings show a “lack of cognizable legal theory,” or 17 “the absence of sufficient facts alleged under a cognizable legal theory,” *Balistreri v. 18 Pacifica Police Dep’t*, 901 F.2d 696, 699 (9th Cir. 1990) (citation omitted), or when an 19 affirmative defense is premised on facts alleged in the complaint, *Scott v. Kuhlmann*, 746 20 F.2d 1377, 1378 (9th Cir. 1994).

21 DISCUSSION

22 I will consider only those claims found cognizable in the Order of Service, 23 specifically the Eighth Amendment endangerment claims against Balli and Crews. 24 Accordingly, all other defendants and any claims other than the Eighth Amendment 25 endangerment claims are DISMISSED. 26 The Ninth Circuit had held that labelling an inmate a “snitch” can pose such a 27 substantial risk of serious harm from other inmates that it may support an Eighth 1 However, “[w]hile the Ninth Circuit held in *Valandingham v. Bojorquez* that calling an 2 inmate a ‘snitch’ may violate one’s right to be protected from violence while in custody, it 3 did so, in part, because the plaintiff subsequently received threats of violence from other 4 inmates.” *Green v. Chamberlain*, No. 2:19-CV-0109-DMC-P, 2019 WL 3302346, at *7 5 (E.D. Cal. July 23, 2019). “The Ninth Circuit later held Eighth Amendment claims based 6 on a defendant’s words must allege the plaintiff was subjected to retaliation or threats of 7 retaliation at the hands of other

inmates.” Id., citing *Morgan v. MacDonald*, 41 F.3d 1291, 8 1294 (9th Cir. 1994). Furthermore, a plaintiff “must allege facts demonstrating that he was 9 either physically harmed or was threatened with physical harm because of the ‘snitch’ 10 label.” *Brummett v. Lopez*, Case No. 1:21-cv-00086-DAD-BAM (PC), 2021 WL 3722779, 11 at *3, citing *Morgan*, 41 F.3d at 1294 (emphasis added). In *Green v. Camberlain*, the 12 district court found not cognizable plaintiff’s claims that prison officers’ labelling him a 13 snitch subjected him to a risk of serious harm because “there are no allegations that 14 Plaintiff’s fellow inmates retaliated against him.” Id. at *7. 15 Here, Sauls has alleged sufficient facts to state an Eighth Amendment 16 endangerment claim. According to his allegations, which must be assumed as true for the 17 purposes of this Order, defendants labelled him a snitch in front of other prisoners and 18 encouraged prisoners to threaten and attack Sauls, who was threatened by prisoners at 19 SATF. Though the facts supporting the final element occurred outside the Northern 20 District, I find them sufficiently connected to the initiating acts at CTF-Soledad to survive 21 a Rule 12(b)(6) motion to dismiss. Accordingly, defendants’ motion to dismiss is 22 DENIED.

23 CONCLUSION

24 Defendants’ motion to dismiss under Rule 12(b)(6) is DENIED. (Dkt. No. 28.) 25 Defendants’ prior motion to dismiss is DENIED as moot. (Dkt. No. 24.) The only claims 26 in this action are the Eighth Amendment endangerment claims against Balli and Crews. 27 All other claims and defendants are DISMISSED. 1 On or before July 1, 2025, defendants shall file a motion for summary judgment 2 || regarding the Eighth Amendment endangerment claims against Balli and Crews if 3 || warranted. Sauls’s opposition shall be filed within 45 days after defendants’ motion is 4 || filed. Defendants’ reply shall be filed within 15 days after the opposition is filed. The 5 || summary judgment motion shall be deemed submitted on the day the reply brief is due. 6 The Clerk shall terminate all pending motions. 7 IT IS SO ORDERED. 8 || Dated: February 24, 2025 . 9 ®

IAM H. ORRICK

10 United States District Judge 11 qa 12 13 © 15 16 Z 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28