

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF MARYLAND

Thomas C. Johnson v. House of Labeija LLC, et al.

Johnson v. House of Labeija LLC · No. Civ. No. MJM-24-71 · Decided March 30, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of Maryland considered motions to dismiss a pro se defamation action brought by Thomas C. Johnson against House of Labeija LLC and individual defendants. The court concluded that the plaintiff failed to establish federal-question or diversity subject-matter jurisdiction and failed to establish personal jurisdiction over the moving defendants. The action was dismissed without prejudice.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Maryland
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Matthew J. Maddox
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Maryland
DECIDED	March 30, 2026
DOCKET	Civ. No. MJM-24-71
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff brought a single-count defamation action. Defendants Marcus Henderson and Jeffrey Bryant moved to dismiss under Federal Rules of Civil Procedure 12(b)(2) and 12(b)(6), asserting lack of personal jurisdiction and failure to state a claim. The court also considered subject-matter jurisdiction sua sponte.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	For subject-matter jurisdiction, the plaintiff bears the burden of establishing jurisdiction, and the court must dismiss if jurisdiction is lacking. On a Rule 12(b)(2) motion decided from the pleadings and papers, the plaintiff must make a prima facie showing of personal jurisdiction, with allegations accepted as true when supported by the record. On a Rule 12(b)(6) motion, well-pleaded allegations are accepted as true and construed favorably to the plaintiff, but the complaint must contain sufficient factual matter to state a facially plausible claim.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished

PARTIES

Thomas C. Johnson v. House of Labeija LLC, Marcus Henderson, Jeffrey Bryant

TOPICS

motions to dismiss

subject matter jurisdiction

personal jurisdiction

defamation

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

constitutional law

torts

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the court had federal-question jurisdiction over plaintiff's state-law defamation claim.
2. Whether plaintiff established the amount in controversy necessary for diversity jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1332.
3. Whether the court could exercise personal jurisdiction over New York residents Marcus Henderson and Jeffrey Bryant.
4. Whether the complaint plausibly stated a defamation claim against Henderson and Bryant under Rule 12(b)(6).
5. Whether plaintiff was entitled to default judgment, sanctions, or other relief requested in opposition to Henderson's motion.

HOLDINGS

1. A state-law defamation claim does not establish federal-question jurisdiction where the claim does not necessarily depend on resolution of a substantial question of federal law. The cited federal provisions, including 28 U.S.C. § 4101(1) and the purported Cybercrimes Act provision, did not create a cause of action or apply to the alleged conduct.
2. Plaintiff failed to establish diversity jurisdiction because he did not plead facts demonstrating that the amount in controversy exceeded \$75,000.
3. The court lacked personal jurisdiction over both Henderson and Bryant because plaintiff failed to establish jurisdiction under Maryland's long-arm statute and failed to show constitutionally sufficient minimum contacts with Maryland.
4. The complaint failed to state a plausible defamation claim against Henderson and Bryant because it did not identify specific defamatory statements attributable to either defendant and did not provide sufficient factual support for falsity.
5. Plaintiff was not entitled to re-entry of default, default judgment, striking Henderson's motion, or sanctions.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Because Plaintiff fails to establish this Court’s original jurisdiction over this matter, the case must be dismissed against all defendants.” (Section III)

“Thus, Plaintiff fails to establish any prima facie case for this Court’s exercise of personal jurisdiction over either Mr. Henderson or Mr. Bryant.” (Section IV)

“Even if this Court had subject-matter jurisdiction over this action and personal jurisdiction over each Defendant, Plaintiff’s complaint still fails to state a plausible claim for relief against either Defendant.” (Section V)

“Mr. Henderson’s motion to dismiss (ECF No. 17) and Mr. Bryant’s motion to dismiss (ECF No. 39) are GRANTED, and Plaintiff’s complaint is dismissed without prejudice.” (Section VI)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Thomas C. Johnson, a Maryland resident, alleged that defendants defamed him through a memorandum circulated in Facebook ballroom groups and through statements concerning his removal as a judge from ballroom events. The memorandum attributed various misconduct and negative behavior to Johnson and allegedly harmed his reputation and work in the ballroom and LGBTQIA+ communities. Johnson sought compensatory and punitive damages but did not specify an amount of damages or identify specific defamatory statements attributable to Henderson or Bryant.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The action was filed in the District of Maryland. Leonard Re’Mack was voluntarily dismissed, and an earlier default entered against Marcus Henderson was vacated. The Fourth Circuit dismissed plaintiff’s interlocutory appeal from the vacatur for lack of jurisdiction. After service on Jeffrey Bryant, both Henderson’s and Bryant’s motions to dismiss became ripe. The district court granted both motions and dismissed the complaint without prejudice.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Exxon Mobil Corp. v. Allapattah Servs., Inc., 545 U.S. 546, 552 (2005)
- Mansfield, C. & L.M. Ry. Co. v. Swan, 111 U.S. 379, 382 (1884)
- Adams v. Bain, 697 F.2d 1213, 1219 (4th Cir. 1982)
- Cannon v. Peck, 36 F.4th 547, 559 (4th Cir. 2022)
- Wells v. Liddy, 186 F.3d 505, 521 (4th Cir. 1999)
- Lowe v. Groton, Civ. No. JKB-18-3615, 2018 WL 6621502, at *1 (D. Md. Dec. 18, 2018)
- Mulcahey v. Columbia Organic Chemicals Co., Inc., 29 F.3d 148, 151 (4th Cir. 1994)
- Dixon v. Coburg Dairy, Inc., 369 F.3d 811, 816 (4th Cir. 2004)
- Ministry of Defence of State of Kuwait v. Naffa, 105 F.4th 154, 159 (4th Cir. 2024)

- JTH Tax, Inc. v. Frashier, 624 F.3d 635, 638 (4th Cir. 2010)
- Brennan v. Stevenson, Civ. No. JKB-15-2931, 2015 WL 7454109, at *6 (D. Md. Nov. 24, 2015)
- Kamau v. Slate, Civ. No. 4:11-522-RH/CAS, 2013 WL 1883257, at *3 (N.D. Fla. Apr. 4, 2013)
- UMG Recordings, Inc. v. Kurbanov, 963 F.3d 344, 350–52 (4th Cir. 2020)
- Grayson v. Anderson, 816 F.3d 262, 267 (4th Cir. 2016)
- New Wellington Fin. Corp. v. Flagship Resort Dev. Corp., 416 F.3d 290, 294 (4th Cir. 2005)
- Combs v. Bakker, 886 F.2d 673, 676 (4th Cir. 1989)
- Hawkins v. i-TV Digitalis Tavkozlesi zrt., 935 F.3d 211, 226 (4th Cir. 2019)
- Ford Motor Co. v. Mont. Eighth Jud. Dist. Ct., 592 U.S. 351, 352, 358–62 (2021)
- Hertz Corp. v. Friend, 559 U.S. 77, 92–93 (2010)
- Goodyear Dunlop Tires Operations, S.A. v. Brown, 564 U.S. 915, 918–19 (2011)
- Burger King Corp. v. Rudzewicz, Burger King Corp. v. Rudzewicz, 471 U.S. 462, 474, 487 (1985)
- Walden v. Fiore, Walden v. Fiore, 571 U.S. 277, 285 (2014)
- Bristol-Myers Squibb Co. v. Superior Ct. of Cal., San Francisco Cnty., 582 U.S. 255, 262 (2017)
- International Shoe Co. v. State of Washington, Int’l Shoe Co. v. Washington, 326 U.S. 310, 316–17 (1945)
- Consulting Eng’rs Corp. v. Geometric Ltd., 561 F.3d 273, 278 (4th Cir. 2009)
- Sneha Media & Ent., LLC v. Associated Broad. Co. P Ltd., 911 F.3d 192, 198–99 (4th Cir. 2018)
- ESAB Group, Inc. v. Centricut, Inc., 126 F.3d 617, 622 (4th Cir. 1997)
- Carefirst of Md., Inc. v. Carefirst Pregnancy Ctrs., Inc., 334 F.3d 390, 396, 399 (4th Cir. 2003)
- Christian Sci. Bd. of Dirs. of the First Church of Christ v. Nolan, 259 F.3d 209, 215 (4th Cir. 2001)
- Winter v. Pinkins, Civ. No. JKB-14-2124, 2014 WL 5500393, at *3–4 (D. Md. Oct. 29, 2014)
- Dring v. Sullivan, 423 F. Supp. 2d 540, 546 (D. Md. 2006)
- World-Wide Volkswagen Corp. v. Woodson, 444 U.S. 286, 297 (1980)
- Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555, 570 (2007)
- Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009)
- Johnson v. City of Shelby, 574 U.S. 10, 11 (2014) (per curiam)
- Venkatraman v. REI Sys., Inc., 417 F.3d 418, 420 (4th Cir. 2005)
- Mylan Labs., Inc. v. Matkari, 7 F.3d 1130, 1134 (4th Cir. 1993)
- Folkes v. Nelsen, 34 F.4th 258, 272 (4th Cir. 2022)
- Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972)
- Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007)
- Sheehan v. Saoud, 650 F. App’x 143, 152 (4th Cir. 2016)
- Weller v. Dep’t of Soc. Servs., 901 F.2d 387, 391 (4th Cir. 1990)
- Publish Am., LLP v. Stern, 84 A.3d 237, 247 n.16 (Md. App. Ct. 2014)
- Lake Shore Invs. v. Rite Aid Corp., 509 A.2d 727, 727 (Md. App. Ct. 1986)
- Sirpal v. Wang, Civ. No. WDQ-12-0365, 2013 WL 5234256, at *5 (D. Md. Sept. 16, 2013)
- Sullivan v. City of Frederick, Civ. No. JKB-17-1881, 2018 WL 337759, at *8 (D. Md. Jan. 9, 2018)

- *Metromedia, Inc. v. Hillman*, 400 A.2d 1117, 1123 (Md. 1979)
- *Daniel v. Home Box Off.*, Civ. No. ELH-23-233, 2023 WL 8478867, at *11 (D. Md. Dec. 7, 2023)
- *Rorie v. Bd. of Educ. of Charles Cnty.*, 653 F. Supp. 3d 217, 241 (D. Md. 2023)
- *KDSTI Slassie Tewahado Church v. Ghebreamlak*, Civ. No. DKC-2007-0863, 2008 WL 11366449, at *3 (D. Md. July 17, 2008)
- *Samuels v. Tschechtelin*, 763 A.2d 209, 245 (Md. App. Ct. 2000)
- *Eng. Boiler & Tube, Inc. v. W.C. Rouse & Son, Inc.*, 172 F.3d 862, No. 97-2397, 1999 WL 89125, at *3 (4th Cir. 1999) (per curiam)
- *Indep. Newspapers, Inc. v. Brodie*, 966 A.2d 432, 448 (Md. 2009)
- *M & S Furniture Sales Co., Inc. v. Edward J. De Bartolo Corp.*, 241 A.2d 126, 128 (Md. 1968)
- *Stenlund v. Marriott Int'l, Inc.*, 172 F. Supp. 3d 874, 887 (D. Md. 2016)
- *Ferdinand-Davenport v. Child.'s Guild*, 742 F. Supp. 2d 772, 777 (D. Md. 2010)
- *Kissi v. Panzer*, 664 F. Supp. 2d 120, 123 (D.D.C. 2009)