

FILED: July 31, 2018

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE FOURTH CIRCUIT

No. 18-6609
(3:18-cv-00061-FDW)

LESTER BARNETT

Plaintiff - Appellant

v.

CITY OF GASTONIA

Defendant - Appellee

J U D G M E N T

In accordance with the decision of this court, the judgment of the district court is affirmed.

This judgment shall take effect upon issuance of this court's mandate in accordance with Fed. R. App. P. 41.

/s/ PATRICIA S. CONNOR, CLERK

UNPUBLISHED

**UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE FOURTH CIRCUIT**

No. 18-6609

LESTER BARNETT,

Plaintiff - Appellant,

v.

CITY OF GASTONIA,

Defendant - Appellee.

Appeal from the United States District Court for the Western District of North Carolina,
at Charlotte. Frank D. Whitney, Chief District Judge. (3:18-cv-00061-FDW)

Submitted: July 26, 2018

Decided: July 31, 2018

Before GREGORY, Chief Judge, FLOYD, Circuit Judge, and HAMILTON, Senior
Circuit Judge.

Affirmed by unpublished per curiam opinion.

Lester Barnett, Jr., Appellant Pro Se.

Unpublished opinions are not binding precedent in this circuit.

PER CURIAM:

Lester Barnett appeals the district court's order dismissing without prejudice his 42 U.S.C. § 1983 (2012) complaint as frivolous pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i) (2012). We have reviewed the record and find no reversible error. Accordingly, we affirm for the reasons stated by the district court. *Barnett v. City of Gastonia*, No. 3:18-cv-00061-FDW (W.D.N.C. Apr. 27, 2018). We dispense with oral argument because the facts and legal contentions are adequately presented in the materials before this court and argument would not aid the decisional process.

AFFIRMED

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF NORTH CAROLINA
CHARLOTTE DIVISION
3:18-cv-61-FDW

LESTER BARNETT,

Plaintiff,

vs.

CITY OF GASTONIA, et al.,

Defendants.

ORDER

THIS MATTER is before the Court on initial review of *pro se* Plaintiff's Complaint, (Doc. No. 1). Plaintiff is proceeding *in forma pauperis*. See (Doc. No. 6).

I. BACKGROUND

Pro se Plaintiff has filed a civil rights suit pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 for a 1980 North Carolina conviction. He names the following as Defendants the City of Gastonia and the State of North Carolina. He complains that he was wrongfully convicted of a safecracking that occurred in Gaston County while he was incarcerated in Mecklenburg County Jail. He also alleges that no valid record of his conviction or sentence can be found although it is a legal requirement to keep these documents in the case of a guilty plea. He seeks punitive and compensatory damages as well as exoneration of Gaston County crimes.

II. STANDARD OF REVIEW

Because Plaintiff is a prisoner proceeding *in forma pauperis*, the Court must review the Complaint to determine whether it is subject to dismissal on the grounds that it is "(i) frivolous or malicious; (ii) fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted; or (iii) seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief." 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B). In its frivolity

review, a court must determine whether the Complaint raises an indisputably meritless legal theory or is founded upon clearly baseless factual contentions, such as fantastic or delusional scenarios. Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 327-28 (1989). A complaint should not be dismissed for failure to state a claim “unless ‘after accepting all well-pleaded allegations in the plaintiff’s complaint as true and drawing all reasonable factual inferences from those facts in the plaintiff’s favor, it appears certain that the plaintiff cannot prove any set of facts in support of his claim entitling him to relief.’” Veney v. Wyche, 293 F.3d 726, 730 (4th Cir. 2002) (quoting Edwards v. City of Goldsboro, 178 F.3d 231, 244 (4th Cir. 1999)).

A *pro se* complaint must be construed liberally. See Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972); see also Smith v. Smith, 589 F.3d 736, 738 (4th Cir. 2009) (“Liberal construction of the pleadings is particularly appropriate where ... there is a *pro se* complaint raising civil rights issues.”). However, the liberal construction requirement will not permit a district court to ignore a clear failure to allege facts in his complaint which set forth a claim that is cognizable under federal law. Weller v. Dep’t of Soc. Servs., 901 F.2d 387 (4th Cir. 1990). A *pro se* complaint must still contain sufficient facts “to raise a right to relief above the speculative level” and “state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555, 570 (2007); see Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662 (2009) (the Twombly plausibility standard applies to all federal civil complaints including those filed under § 1983). This “plausibility standard requires a plaintiff to demonstrate more than a sheer possibility that a defendant has acted unlawfully.” Francis v. Giacomelli, 588 F.3d 186, 193 (4th Cir. 2009) (internal quotation marks omitted). He must articulate facts that, when accepted as true, demonstrate he has stated a claim entitling him to relief.

Id.

III. DISCUSSION

Federal law opens two main avenues to relief on complaints related to imprisonment: a petition for habeas corpus pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2254, and a complaint under the Civil Rights act, § 1983. Muhammad v. Close, 540 U.S. 749, 750 (2004). “Habeas corpus, and not § 1983, is the exclusive federal remedy for state prisoners seeking actual release from confinement,” Griffin v. Baltimore Police Dep’t, 804 F.3d 692, 694–95 (4th Cir. 2015) (citing Preiser v. Rodriguez, 411 U.S. 475, 487–90 (1973)), and “requests for relief turning on circumstances of confinement may be presented in a § 1983 action,” Muhammad, 540 U.S. at 750. Some cases are “hybrids,” where a prisoner seeks damages, which are unavailable through a habeas action, but on allegations that either imply the invalidity of an underlying conviction or of a particular ground for denying relief short of serving the maximum term of confinement. Id. To address this situation, the Supreme Court held in Heck v. Humphrey, 512 U.S. 477 (1994), that:

to recover damages for ... harm caused by actions whose unlawfulness would render a conviction or sentence invalid, a § 1983 plaintiff must prove that the conviction and sentence has been reversed on direct appeal, expunged by executive order, declared invalid by a state tribunal authorized to make such determination, or called into question by a federal court’s issuance of a writ of habeas corpus....

Id. at 485.

For Heck to bar a § 1983 claim, (1) “a judgment in favor of the plaintiff [must] necessarily imply the invalidity of [a plaintiff’s] conviction or sentence,” Heck, 512 U.S. at 487, and (2), the claim must be brought by a claimant who is either (i) currently in custody or (ii) no longer in custody because the sentence has been served, but nevertheless could have practicably sought habeas relief while in custody, Covey v. Assessor of Ohio Cty., 777 F.3d 186, 197 (4th Cir. 2015).

In the instant case, Plaintiff has attached records to his Compliant indicating that his North

Carolina safecracking conviction has not been overturned. His present attack on that conviction's validity would necessarily undermine the State court conviction and is therefore barred by Heck and will be dismissed without prejudice as frivolous.

IV. CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated herein, the Complaint is dismissed without prejudice as frivolous pursuant to Heck and § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i).

IT IS, THEREFORE, ORDERED that:

1. The Complaint is **DISMISSED** without prejudice pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i).
2. The Clerk is instructed to close this case.

Signed: April 27, 2018



Frank D. Whitney
Chief United States District Judge



**United States District Court
Western District of North Carolina
Charlotte Division**

Lester Barnett,

Plaintiff(s),

vs.

City of Gastonia,
Defendant(s).

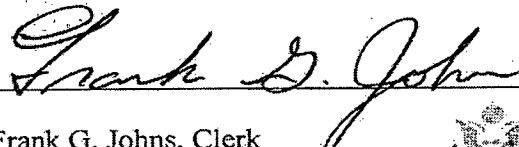
JUDGMENT IN CASE

3:18-cv-00061-FDW

DECISION BY COURT. This action having come before the Court and a decision having been rendered;

IT IS ORDERED AND ADJUDGED that Judgment is hereby entered in accordance with the Court's April 27, 2018 Order.

April 27, 2018


Frank G. Johns, Clerk
United States District Court



**Additional material
from this filing is
available in the
Clerk's Office.**