

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE
WESTERN DIVISION

DEONTA MATTHEWS,)
)
 Plaintiff,)
)
 VS.) No. 15-2735-JDT-cgc
)
 C/O FNU LEE., ET AL.,)
)
 Defendants.)

ORDER DENYING MOTION FOR PRELIMINARY INJUNCTION,
PARTIALLY DISMISSING COMPLAINT AND DIRECTING THAT PROCESS BE ISSUED
AND SERVED ON DEFENDANTS LEE AND SCOTT

On November 5, 2015, Plaintiff Deonta Matthews (“Matthews”), who is currently an inmate at the Northeast Correctional Complex (“NECX”) in Mountain City, Tennessee, filed a *pro se* complaint pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, accompanied by a motion to proceed *in forma pauperis* in the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee. (ECF Nos. 1 & 2.) The complaint concerns Matthews’s previous incarceration at the West Tennessee State Penitentiary in Henning, Tennessee. On November 10, 2015, U.S. District Judge Todd J. Campbell granted leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*, assessed the civil filing fee pursuant to the Prison Litigation Reform Act (“PLRA”), 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(a)-(b), and transferred the case to this district. (ECF No. 3.) The Clerk shall record the defendants as Correctional Officer (“C/O”) First Name Unknown (“FNU”) Lee, C/O FNU Scott, and Former WTSP Warden James M. Holloway. The Defendants are sued in both their individual and official capacities.

I. The Complaint

Matthews alleges that on the morning of November 24, 2014, he was being escorted from his cell to the recreation (“Rec”) cages of Unit 6, A-B sides, in full restraints because he is a maximum security inmate, by Defendants Lee and Scott, when he was attacked by another inmate and cut nine times across the face. (ECF No. 1 at 4.) Matthews alleges that Defendants Lee and Scott failed to protect him by “running off” and leaving Matthews “defenseless, helpless, and at the mercy of the inmate.” (*Id.*) Matthews further alleges his attacker would not have had access to him except for the failure of Lee and Scott to ensure the area was safe for Matthews to be escorted to and from the Rec yard cages. (*Id.*) Matthews contends that as a result of Defendants Lee’s and Scott’s dereliction of duty, failure to follow procedure, and failure to take appropriate action to shield him from the other inmate, he now suffers from permanent, visible “mutilated scar laceration damage” due to the numerous slashes and cuts he received. (*Id.*)

On the day of the assault, Matthews alleges that he first walked out he saw the attacker “pushing the cage on the second cage on the right open.” (*Id.*) Matthews states he “instantly realized” it was the same cage that had been broken for months without a work order to get it fixed; a problem for which, Matthews contends, Defendant Warden Holloway was responsible. (*Id.*) Matthews told Defendants Lee and Scott that the inmate was trying to come out, and when they noticed the inmate was leaving the cage, Lee and Scott left Matthews in handcuffs and shackles, allowing the inmate to cut his face nine or more times. (*Id.*)

Matthews alleges the Defendants are liable due to their failure protect him from an inmate who was known to have threatened him previously and failure to follow policy by putting an inmate in an “out-of-service” Rec cage that could not be locked. (*Id.* at 5.) As a result of the

assault Matthews alleges that his face is disfigured and that he now suffers depression, feelings of mistrust of staff, and fearful thoughts from the traumatic, life-threatening experience. (*Id.*)

Matthews seeks punitive and compensatory damages, plastic surgery for his face and neck, and relief from his sentence. (*Id.* at 6.)

II. Analysis

A. Screening and Standard

The Court is required to screen prisoner complaints and to dismiss any complaint, or any portion thereof, if the complaint—

(1) is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted; or

(2) seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief.

28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b); see also 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B).

In assessing whether the complaint in this case states a claim on which relief may be granted, the court applies standards under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6), as stated in *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 677-79 (2009), and in *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555-57 (2007). *Hill v. Lappin*, 630 F.3d 468, 470-71 (6th Cir. 2010). “Accepting all well-pleaded allegations in the complaint as true, the Court ‘consider[s] the factual allegations in [the] complaint to determine if they plausibly suggest an entitlement to relief.’” *Williams v. Curtin*, 631 F.3d 380, 383 (6th Cir. 2011) (quoting *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 681) (alteration in original). “[P]leadings that . . . are no more than conclusions . . . are not entitled to the assumption of truth. While legal conclusions can provide the framework of a complaint, they must be supported by factual allegations.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 679; see also *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555 n.3 (“Rule 8(a)(2) still requires a ‘showing,’ rather than a blanket assertion, of entitlement to relief. Without

some factual allegation in the complaint, it is hard to see how a claimant could satisfy the requirement of providing not only ‘fair notice’ of the nature of the claim, but also ‘grounds’ on which the claim rests.”).

“A complaint can be frivolous either factually or legally. Any complaint that is legally frivolous would *ipso facto* fail to state a claim upon which relief can be granted.” *Hill*, 630 F.3d at 470 (citing *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325, 328-29 (1989)).

Whether a complaint is factually frivolous under §§ 1915A(b)(1) and 1915(e)(2)(B)(i) is a separate issue from whether it fails to state a claim for relief. Statutes allowing a complaint to be dismissed as frivolous give “judges not only the authority to dismiss a claim based on an indisputably meritless legal theory, but also the unusual power to pierce the veil of the complaint’s factual allegations and dismiss those claims whose factual contentions are clearly baseless.” *Neitzke*, 490 U.S. at 327, 109 S. Ct. 1827 (interpreting 28 U.S.C. § 1915). Unlike a dismissal for failure to state a claim, where a judge must accept all factual allegations as true, *Iqbal*, 129 S. Ct. at 1949-50, a judge does not have to accept “fantastic or delusional” factual allegations as true in prisoner complaints that are reviewed for frivolousness. *Neitzke*, 490 U.S. at 327-28, 109 S. Ct. 1827.

Id. at 471.

“*Pro se* complaints are to be held ‘to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers,’ and should therefore be liberally construed.” *Williams*, 631 F.3d at 383 (quoting *Martin v. Overton*, 391 F.3d 710, 712 (6th Cir. 2004)). *Pro se* litigants and prisoners are not exempt from the requirements of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. *Wells v. Brown*, 891 F.2d 591, 594 (6th Cir. 1989); *see also Brown v. Matauszak*, No. 09-2259, 2011 WL 285251, at *5 (6th Cir. Jan. 31, 2011) (affirming dismissal of *pro se* complaint for failure to comply with “unique pleading requirements” and stating “a court cannot ‘create a claim which [a plaintiff] has not spelled out in his pleading’”) (quoting *Clark v. Nat’l Travelers Life Ins. Co.*, 518 F.2d 1167, 1169 (6th Cir. 1975)) (alteration in original); *Payne v. Sec’y of Treas.*, 73 F. App’x 836, 837 (6th Cir. 2003) (affirming *sua sponte* dismissal of complaint pursuant to Fed. R.

Civ. P. 8(a)(2) and stating, “[n]either this court nor the district court is required to create Payne’s claim for her”); *cf. Pliler v. Ford*, 542 U.S. 225, 231 (2004) (“District judges have no obligation to act as counsel or paralegal to *pro se* litigants.”); *Young Bok Song v. Gipson*, 423 F. App’x 506, 510 (6th Cir. 2011) (“[W]e decline to affirmatively require courts to ferret out the strongest cause of action on behalf of *pro se* litigants. Not only would that duty be overly burdensome, it would transform the courts from neutral arbiters of disputes into advocates for a particular party. While courts are properly charged with protecting the rights of all who come before it, that responsibility does not encompass advising litigants as to what legal theories they should pursue.”).

B. § 1983 Claim

Matthews filed his complaint pursuant to actions under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Section 1983 provides:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory or the District of Columbia, subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress, except that in any action brought against a judicial officer for an act or omission taken in such officer's judicial capacity, injunctive relief shall not be granted unless a declaratory decree was violated or declaratory relief was unavailable. For the purposes of this section, any Act of Congress applicable exclusively to the District of Columbia shall be considered to be a statute of the District of Columbia.

To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege two elements: (1) a deprivation of rights secured by the “Constitution and laws” of the United States (2) committed by a defendant acting under color of state law. *Adickes v. S.H. Kress & Co.*, 398 U.S. 144, 150 (1970).

Any claims against the Defendants in their official capacity are properly asserted against their employer, the State of Tennessee. However, Plaintiff cannot sue the State of Tennessee under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The Eleventh Amendment to the United States Constitution provides that “[t]he Judicial power of the United States shall not be construed to extend to any suit in law or equity, commenced or prosecuted against one of the United States by Citizens of another State, or by Citizens or Subjects of any Foreign State.” U.S. Const. amend. XI. The Eleventh Amendment has been construed to prohibit citizens from suing their own states in federal court. *Welch v. Tex. Dep’t of Highways & Pub. Transp.*, 483 U.S. 468, 472 (1987); *Pennhurst State Sch. & Hosp. v. Halderman*, 465 U.S. 89, 100 (1984); *Employees of Dep’t of Pub. Health & Welfare v. Mo. Dep’t of Pub. Health & Welfare*, 411 U.S. 279, 280 (1973); *see also Va. Office for Protection & Advocacy v. Stewart*, 131 S. Ct. 1632, 1638 (2011) (“A State may waive its sovereign immunity at its pleasure, and in some circumstances Congress may abrogate it by appropriate legislation. But absent waiver or valid abrogation, federal courts may not entertain a private person’s suit against a State.” (citations omitted)). By its terms, the Eleventh Amendment bars all suits, regardless of the relief sought. *Pennhurst*, 465 U.S. at 100-01. Tennessee has not waived its sovereign immunity. Tenn. Code Ann. § 20-13-102(a). Moreover, a state is not a person within the meaning of 42 U.S.C. § 1983. *Lapides v. Bd. of Regents of the Univ. Sys. of Ga.*, 535 U.S. 613, 617 (2002); *Will v. Mich. Dep’t of State Police*, 491 U.S. 58, 71 (1989).

Matthews’s claims against Defendant Holloway appear to be due to his supervisory role as former warden of WTSP. Under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, “[g]overnment officials may not be held liable for the unconstitutional conduct of their subordinates under a theory of *respondeat superior*.” *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 676; *see also Bellamy v. Bradley*, 729 F.2d 416, 421

(6th Cir. 1984). Thus, “a plaintiff must plead that each Government-official defendant, through the official’s own official actions, violated the Constitution.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 676.

There must be a showing that the supervisor encouraged the specific instance of misconduct or in some other way directly participated in it. At a minimum, a § 1983 plaintiff must show that a supervisory official at least implicitly authorized, approved or knowingly acquiesced in the unconstitutional conduct of the offending subordinates.

Bellamy, 729 F.2d at 421 (citation omitted). A supervisory official, who is aware of the unconstitutional conduct of his subordinates, but fails to act, generally cannot be held liable in his individual capacity. *Grinter v. Knight*, 532 F.3d 567, 575-76 (6th Cir. 2008); *Gregory v. City of Louisville*, 444 F.3d 725, 751 (6th Cir. 2006); *Shehee v. Luttrell*, 199 F.3d 295, 300 (6th Cir. 1999); *Lillard v. Shelby Cnty. Bd. of Educ.*, 76 F.3d 716, 727-28 (6th Cir. 1996). A failure to take corrective action in response to an inmate grievance or complaint does not supply the necessary personal involvement for § 1983 liability. *See George v. Smith*, 507 F.3d 605, 609-10 (7th Cir. 2007) (“Ruling against a prisoner on an administrative complaint does not cause or contribute to the [constitutional] violation. A guard who stands and watches while another guard beats a prisoner violates the Constitution; a guard who rejects an administrative complaint about a completed act of misconduct does not.”). Defendants Holloway cannot be sued because policy or procedure was not followed by other employees of WTSP.

To the extent that Matthews is alleging the Defendants failed to protect him from the attack, the claim arises under the Eighth Amendment, which prohibits cruel and unusual punishments. *See generally Wilson v. Seiter*, 501 U.S. 294 (1991). An Eighth Amendment claim consists of both objective and subjective components. *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 834 (1994); *Hudson v. McMillian*, 503 U.S. 1, 8 (1992); *Wilson*, 501 U.S. at 298; *Williams v. Curtin*, 633 F.3d at 383; *Mingus v. Butler*, 591 F.3d 474, 479-80 (6th Cir. 2010). The objective

component requires that the deprivation be “sufficiently serious.” *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 834; *Hudson*, 503 U.S. at 8; *Wilson*, 501 U.S. at 298. To satisfy the objective component of an Eighth Amendment claim, a prisoner must show that he “is incarcerated under conditions posing a substantial risk of serious harm,” *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 834; *see also Miller v. Calhoun Cnty.*, 408 F.3d 803, 812 (6th Cir. 2005), or that he has been deprived of the “minimal civilized measure of life’s necessities,” *Wilson*, 501 U.S. at 298 (quoting *Rhodes v. Chapman*, 452 U.S. 337, 347 (1981)); *see also Hadix v. Johnson*, 367 F.3d 513, 525 (6th Cir. 2004). “The Supreme Court has held that ‘prison officials have a duty . . . to protect prisoners from violence at the hands of other prisoners.’” *Bishop v. Hackel*, 636 F.3d 757, 766 (6th Cir. 2011) (quoting *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 834).

To establish the subjective component of an Eighth Amendment violation, a prisoner must demonstrate that the official acted with the requisite intent, that is, that he had a “sufficiently culpable state of mind.” *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 834; *see also Wilson*, 501 U.S. at 297, 302-03. The plaintiff must show that the prison officials acted with “deliberate indifference” to a substantial risk that the prisoner would suffer serious harm. *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 834; *Wilson*, 501 U.S. at 303; *Helling v. McKinney*, 509 U.S. at 32; *Woods v. Lecureux*, 110 F.3d 1215,1222 (6th Cir. 1997); *Street*, 102 F.3d at 814; *Taylor v. Mich. Dep’t of Corr.*, 69 F.3d 76, 79 (6th Cir. 1995). “[D]eliberate indifference describes a state of mind more blameworthy than negligence.” *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 835. Thus,

[a] prison official cannot be found liable under the Eighth Amendment for denying an inmate humane conditions of confinement unless the official knows of and disregards an excessive risk to inmate health or safety; the official must both be aware of facts from which the inference could be drawn that a substantial risk of serious harm exists, and he must also draw the inference. This approach comports best with the text of the Eighth Amendment as our cases have interpreted it. The Eighth Amendment does not outlaw cruel and unusual “conditions”; it outlaws cruel and unusual “punishments.” An act or omission

unaccompanied by knowledge of a significant risk of harm might well be something society wishes to discourage, and if harm does result society might well wish to assure compensation. The common law reflects such concerns when it imposes tort liability on a purely objective basis. . . . But an official's failure to alleviate a significant risk that he should have perceived but did not, while no cause for commendation, cannot under our cases be condemned as the infliction of punishment.

Id. at 837-38 (emphasis added; citations omitted); *see also Garretson v. City of Madison Heights*, 407 F.3d 789, 796 (6th Cir. 2005) (“If the officers failed to act in the face of an obvious risk of which they should have known but did not, then they did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment.”). The subjective component must be evaluated for each defendant individually. *Bishop*, 636 F.3d at 767; *see also id.* at 768 (“[W]e must focus on whether each individual Deputy had the personal involvement necessary to permit a finding of subjective knowledge.”).

Matthews alleges that he told Defendants Lee and Scott that the assailant inmate was trying to come out of his cage, and upon their noticing the inmate coming out of the cage, they ran and left Matthews in handcuffs and shackled, allowing the assault to occur. (ECF No. 1 at 4.) For purposes of screening, Matthews has alleged a plausible Eighth Amendment claim against these Defendants for failure to protect.

C. Motion for Preliminary Injunction

On May 3, 2016, Matthews filed a Motion for Preliminary Injunction asking the court to grant him parole. (ECF No. 10.) When a prisoner seeks to challenge his conviction and the validity and/or duration of his confinement, his sole remedy is a petition for a writ of habeas corpus. *Preiser v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 475, 500 (1973); *see also Muhammad v. Close*, 540 U.S. 749, 750 (2004) (per curiam) (“Challenges to the validity of any confinement or to particulars affecting its duration are the province of habeas corpus.”). The court declines to address this motion as a habeas petition; therefore, the motion for preliminary injunction is DENIED.

III. CONCLUSION

The Court DISMISSES all claims against Defendant Holloway and the official capacity claims against Defendants Lee and Scott for failure to state a claim on which relief can be granted, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) and 1915A(b)(1). Process will be issued for Defendants Lee and Scott on the individual capacity claims for failure to protect.

It is ORDERED that the Clerk shall issue process for Defendants Lee and Scott and deliver that process to the U.S. Marshal for service. Service shall be made on Defendants Lee and Scott pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 4(e) and Tennessee Rules of Civil Procedure 4.04(1) and (10), either by mail or personally if mail service is not effective. All costs of service shall be advanced by the United States.

It is further ORDERED that Matthews shall serve a copy of every subsequent document he files in this cause on the attorneys for Defendants Lee and Scott or on any unrepresented Defendant. Matthews shall make a certificate of service on every document filed. Matthews shall familiarize himself with Federal Rules of Civil Procedure and this Court's Local Rules.¹

Matthews shall promptly notify the Clerk, in writing, of any change of address or extended absence. Failure to comply with these requirements, or any other order of the Court may result in the dismissal of this case without further notice.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

s/ **James D. Todd**
JAMES D. TODD
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

¹ A copy of the Local Rules may be obtained from the Clerk. The Local Rules are also available on the Court's website at www.tnwd.courts.gov/pdf/content/LocalRules.pdf.