

ARK253 Doe v Archdiocese of N.Y.

2022 NY Slip Op 32848(U)

August 18, 2022

Supreme Court, New York County

Docket Number: Index No. 950336/2020

Judge: Laurence L. Love

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This opinion is uncorrected and not selected for official publication.

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
NEW YORK COUNTY

PRESENT: HON. LAURENCE LOVE PART 63M

Justice

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ARK253 DOE,

Plaintiff,

- v -

ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK, JESUIT FATHERS AND BROTHERS A/K/A SOCIETY OF JESUS D/B/A U.S.A. MIDWEST PROVINCE OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS F/K/A CHICAGO PROVINCE OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS, SOCIETY OF JESUS A/K/A JESUIT FATHERS AND BROTHERS D/B/A THE NEW YORK PROVINCE OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS A/K/A U.S.A. NORTHEAST PROVINCE OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS, FORDHAM UNIVERSITY, JOHN XXIII ECUMENICAL CENTER, DOES 1-5 WHOSE IDENTITIES ARE UNKNOWN TO PLAINTIFF

Defendant.

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The following e-filed documents, listed by NYSCEF document number (Motion 002) 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 35, 49, 50, 51, 52, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 85

were read on this motion to/for DISMISS

The following e-filed documents, listed by NYSCEF document number (Motion 003) 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 53, 54, 64

were read on this motion to/for DISMISSAL

The following e-filed documents, listed by NYSCEF document number (Motion 005) 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91

were read on this motion to/for DISMISS

Upon the foregoing documents, the decision on defendant, THE USA NORTHEAST PROVINCE OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS, INC. and THE NEW YORK PROVINCE OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS i/s/a JESUIT FATHERS AND BROTHERS d/b/a THE U.S.A NORTHEAST PROVINCE OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS ("Jesuits") motion to dismiss pursuant to CPLR 3211(a)(5) and (7), defendant Archdiocese of New York's ("Archdiocese") motion seeking an Order dismissing plaintiff's complaint as against it pursuant to CPLR §§ 3211(a)(1),

3211 (a)(7), and 3212(b) and defendant Fordham University motion seeking an Order dismissing plaintiff's complaint as against it pursuant to CPLR §§ 3211(a)(1), 3211 (a)(7) is as follows:

Plaintiff commenced the instant action by filing a summons and complaint in this Child Victims Act action on July 20, 2020 alleging that From approximately 1973 to 1976, when Plaintiff was approximately 9 to 12 years old, Father Maurice F. Meyers, S.J. ("Fr. Meyers") engaged in unpermitted sexual contact with Plaintiff in violation of a criminal statute which qualifies under the CVA. Arising from same, plaintiff pleads causes of action of 1) Negligence, 2) Negligent Training and Supervision of Employees, and 3) Negligent Retention of Employees. Thereafter on October 26, 2021, plaintiff filed an amended complaint adding .

The Jesuits seek dismissal of this action pursuant CPLR §3211(a)(7) and §3211(a)(5), arguing that plaintiff's claim fails to meet the pleading requirements of CPLR §214-g and is therefore untimely. Specifically, said defendants argue that Complaint is entirely devoid of any allegation of specific conduct that would fall within the definition of "sexual offense" within the Penal Law, as required by Section 214-g and that the Complaint fails to allege where such conduct occurred, or more specifically, that such conduct occurred in New York. Contrary to movants' argument, the Complaint states that "Plaintiff and Plaintiff's family came in came in contact with Fr. Conroy as an agent and representative of Defend" and that "From approximately 1973 to 1976, when Plaintiff was approximately 9 to 12 years old, Fr. Meyers engaged in unpermitted sexual contact with Plaintiff in violation of at least one section of New York Penal Law Article 130 and/or § 263.05, or a predecessor statute that prohibited such conduct at the time of the abuse." Further, any act which violates New York Penal Law Article 130 and/or § 263.05 necessarily occurred within New York State.

Said defendants also seek dismissal arguing that plaintiff has failed to plead its negligence claims. In determining a motion to dismiss a complaint pursuant to CPLR §3211(a)(7), a court's role is deciding “whether the pleading states a cause of action, and if from its four corners factual allegations are discerned which taken together manifest any cause of action cognizable at law a motion for dismissal will fail” (*African Diaspora Maritime Corp. v Golden Gate Yacht Club*, 109 AD3d 204 [1st Dept 2013]; *Siegmund Strauss, Inc. v East 149th Realty Corp.*, 104 AD3d 401 [1st Dept 2013]). The standard on a motion to dismiss a pleading for failure to state a cause of action is not whether the party has artfully drafted the pleading, but whether deeming the pleading to allege whatever can be reasonably implied from its statements, a cause of action can be sustained (see *Stendig, Inc. v Thorn Rock Realty Co.*, 163 AD2d 46 [1st Dept 1990]; *Leviton Manufacturing Co., Inc. v Blumberg*, 242 AD2d 205, 660 NYS2d 726 [1st Dept 1997] [on a motion for dismissal for failure to state a cause of action, the court must accept factual allegations as true]). When considering a motion to dismiss for failure to state a cause of action, the pleadings must be liberally construed (see CPLR §3026; *Siegmund Strauss, Inc.*, 104 AD3d 401, *supra*). In deciding such a motion, the court must “accept the facts as alleged in the complaint as true, accord plaintiffs ‘the benefit of every possible favorable inference,’” and “determine only whether the facts as alleged fit into any cognizable legal theory” (*Siegmund Strauss, Inc.*, 104 AD3d 401, *supra*; *Nonnon v City of New York*, 9 NY3d 825 [2007]; *Leon v Martinez*, 84 NY2d 83, 87-88 [1994]). However, “allegations consisting of bare legal conclusions as well as factual claims flatly contradicted by documentary evidence are not” presumed to be true or accorded every favorable inference (*David v Hack*, 97 AD3d 437 [1st Dept 2012]; *Biondi v Beekman Hill House Apt. Corp.*, 257 AD2d 76, 81 [1st Dept 1999], *aff'd* 94 NY2d 659 [2000]; *Kliebert v McKoan*, 228 AD2d 232 [1st Dept], *lv denied* 89 NY2d 802 [1996], and the criterion becomes “whether the proponent of the pleading

has a cause of action, not whether he has stated one” (*Guggenheimer v Ginzburg*, 43 NY2d 268, 275 [1977]; see also *Leon*, 84 NY2d at 88, supra; *Ark Bryant Park Corp. v Bryant Park Restoration Corp.*, 285 AD2d 143, 150 [1st Dept 2001]; “In deciding such a pre-answer motion, the court is not authorized to assess the relative merits of the complaint’s allegations against the defendant’s contrary assertions or to determine whether or not plaintiff has produced evidence to support his claims” (*Salles v Chase Manhattan Bank*, 300 AD2d 226, 228 [1st Dept 2002]).

Rather, where a motion to dismiss is directed at the sufficiency of a complaint, the plaintiff is afforded the benefit of a liberal construction of the pleadings: “The scope of a court’s inquiry on a motion to dismiss under CPLR §3211 is narrowly circumscribed” (*1199 Housing Corp. v International Fidelity Ins. Co.*, NYLJ January 18, 2005, p. 26 col.4, citing *P.T. Bank Central Asia v Chinese Am. Bank*, 301 AD2d 373, 375 [1st Dept 2003]), the object being “to determine if, assuming the truth of the facts alleged, the complaint states the elements of a legally cognizable cause of action” (id. at 376; see *Rovello v Orofino Realty Co.*, 40 NY2d 633, 634 [1976]).

It is the movant who has the burden to demonstrate that, based upon the four corners of the complaint liberally construed in favor of the plaintiff, the pleading states no legally cognizable cause of action (see *Leon*, 84 NY2d at 87-88, supra; *Guggenheimer v Ginzburg*, 43 NY2d 268, 275 [1977]); *Salles v. Chase Manhattan Bank*, 300 AD2d 226, 228 [1st Dept 2002]).

The Jesuits contend that plaintiff has failed to sufficiently plead a separate duty of care owed beyond its duty to use reasonable care in hiring, retaining, supervising and training employees and do not owe a separate general duty to prevent conduct by its subordinate that is illegal, outside of its control, and unforeseeable (see *Kenneth R. v R.C. Diocese of Brooklyn*, 229 AD2d 159, 163 [2d Dept 1997]). The Jesuits further contend that “plaintiff fails to plead the essential elements of a negligent training, retention or supervision claim. In addition to the standard

elements of negligence, Plaintiff must show that the defendant "knew, or should have known, of the [subordinate's] propensity for the sort of conduct which caused the injury," and that the "tort was committed on the employer's premises with the employer's chattels" (see *Ehrens v Lutheran Church*, 385 F3d 232, 235 [2d Cir 2004].) Moving Defendants further contend that Plaintiff's conclusory allegations of notice are not sufficient to state a cause of action.

Fordham and the Archdiocese also move for dismissal on the grounds that they did not own the John XXIII Ecumenical Center nor did the Archdiocese own Fordham University at the time of the alleged wrongful acts.

"[T]here is no statutory requirement that causes of action sounding in negligent hiring, negligent retention, or negligent supervision be pleaded with specificity" (*Kenneth R. v Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn*, 229 AD2d 159 [2d Dept 1997]). Instead, to prevail on a negligence claim, "a plaintiff must demonstrate (1) a duty owed by the defendant to the plaintiff, (2) a breach thereof, and (3) injury proximately resulting therefrom" (*Solomon v City of New York*, 66 NY2d 1026, 1027 [1985]). "A necessary element of a cause of action alleging negligent retention or negligent supervision is that the 'employer knew or should have known of the employee's propensity for the conduct which caused the injury'" (*Bumpus v New York City Transit Authority*, 47 AD3d 653 [2d Dept 2008]).

In this Court's decisions on the issue of sufficient pleading in Child Victims Act cases, the Court has taken a very liberal stance on the issue of whether a negligence cause of action has been sufficiently pled. However, the subject complaint is utterly devoid of any information as to how plaintiff came into contact with Fr. Myers. Plaintiff further fails to detail where the alleged abuse occurred and makes no differentiation between the various defendants. Specifically, it is unclear how plaintiff was present at Fordham University and/or the John XXIII Ecumenical Center. It is

unclear whether plaintiff was a student, a parishioner or some other class of persons. While the complaint does allege that “Defendants placed Fr. Meyers in positions where he had access to and worked with children as an integral part of his work” there is no indication what that work was or where he was assigned. As such, plaintiff has failed to state a cause of action.

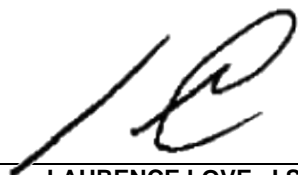
ORDERED that the defendants’ motions to dismiss are GRANTED and the complaint is dismissed; and it is further

ORDERED that plaintiff is granted leave to serve and file an amended complaint so as to replead this action in its entirety within 20 days after service on plaintiff's attorney of a copy of this order with notice of entry; and it is further

ORDERED that, in the event that plaintiff fails to serve and file an amended complaint in conformity herewith within such time, leave to replead shall be deemed denied, and the Clerk of the Court, upon service upon him (60 Centre Street, Room 141B) of a copy of this order with notice of entry and an affirmation/affidavit by defendant’s counsel attesting to such non-compliance, is directed to enter judgment dismissing the action, with prejudice, and with costs and disbursements to the defendant as taxed by the Clerk; and it is further

ORDERED that such service upon the Clerk of the Court shall be made in accordance with the procedures set forth in the *Protocol on Courthouse and County Clerk Procedures for Electronically Filed Cases* (accessible at the “E-Filing” page on the court’s website at the address www.nycourts.gov/supctmanh).

8/18/2022
DATE


LAURENCE LOVE, J.S.C.

CHECK ONE:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	CASE DISPOSED	<input type="checkbox"/>	DENIED
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	GRANTED		
<input type="checkbox"/>	SETTLE ORDER		
<input type="checkbox"/>	INCLUDES TRANSFER/REASSIGN		

<input type="checkbox"/>	NON-FINAL DISPOSITION	<input type="checkbox"/>	OTHER
<input type="checkbox"/>	GRANTED IN PART		
<input type="checkbox"/>	SUBMIT ORDER		
<input type="checkbox"/>	FIDUCIARY APPOINTMENT	<input type="checkbox"/>	REFERENCE

APPLICATION:

CHECK IF APPROPRIATE: