

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF WISCONSIN

MELISSA FRIESEMA,

Plaintiff,

v.

Case No: 1:25-cv-1019

FOREST COUNTY, RONALD SKALLERUD,
ALEX WALRATH, ANTHONY CRUM,
CONNOR JOHNSON, DARRELL WILSON,
THOMAS ROBINSON, JEFFERY MARVIN,
CITY OF CRANDON, RYAN WILSON,
TAMI SLEEMAN, AND BRIAN MESSERSCHMIDT,

Defendants.

COMPLAINT

Plaintiff Melissa Friesema, by her attorneys, Strang Bradley, LLC, for her complaint against Defendants Forest County, Ronald Skallerud, Alex Walrath, Anthony Crum, Connor Johnson, Darrell Wilson, Thomas Robinson, Jeffrey Marvin, City of Crandon, Ryan Wilson, Tami Sleeman, and Brian Messerschmidt states:

INTRODUCTION

1. This is a civil rights lawsuit brought pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 to redress the deprivation under color of law of Melissa Friesema's constitutional right to be free from unreasonable search and seizure in violation of the Fourth Amendment of the United States Constitution.

2. On July 15, 2022, and July 16, 2022, police officers, without reasonable suspicion, for hours illegally seized Melissa Friesema, at the scene, in a squad car, and at

the jail, and illegally seized her clothes and phone even though she was compliant, nonviolent, and only viewed as a potential witness.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

3. This Court has jurisdiction over federal claims under 28 U.S.C. § 1331 and the state law claims for indemnification under 28 U.S.C. § 1367.

4. Venue is proper under 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b). Defendant Forest County and City of Crandon are political subdivisions of the state of Wisconsin located within this judicial district. Additionally, the events giving rise to the claims asserted herein occurred within this judicial district.

PARTIES

5. Plaintiff Melissa Friesema resides in Racine County, Wisconsin.

6. Defendant Forest County is a political subdivision of the state of Wisconsin and is required to pay any tort judgment for damages for which its employees are liable for acts within the scope of their employment.

7. Defendants Ronald Skallerud, Alex Walrath, Anthony Crum, Connor Johnson, Darrell Wilson, Thomas Robinson, and Jeffrey Marvin were, at the time of this occurrence, employed with the Forest County Sheriff's Office.

8. Defendant Skallerud was, at the time of this occurrence, the Forest County Sheriff.

9. At all times that Defendants Ronald Skallerud, Alex Walrath, Anthony Crum, Connor Johnson, Darrell Wilson, Thomas Robinson, and Jeffrey Marvin interacted

with Plaintiff on July 15, 2022 and July 16, 2022, they were on duty and acting under the color of state and local law.

10. At all times that Defendants Ronald Skallerud, Alex Walrath, Anthony Crum, Connor Johnson, Darrell Wilson, Thomas Robinson, and Jeffrey Marvin interacted with Plaintiff on July 15, 2022 and July 16, 2022, they were acting within the scope of their employment with Forest County.

11. Defendant City of Crandon is a political subdivision of the state of Wisconsin and is required to pay any tort judgment for damages for which its employees are liable for acts within the scope of their employment.

12. Defendant Ryan Wilson was, at the time of this occurrence, employed with the City of Crandon Police Department.

13. At all times that Defendant Ryan Wilson interacted with Plaintiff on July 15, 2022 and July 16, 2022, he was on duty and acting under the color of state and local law.

14. At all times that Defendant Ryan Wilson interacted with Plaintiff on July 15, 2022 and July 16, 2022, he was acting within the scope of his employment with Forest County.

15. Defendants Tami Sleeman and Brian Messerschmidt were, at the time of this occurrence, employed by the State of Wisconsin with the Wisconsin Department of Justice Division of Criminal Investigation.

16. At all times that Defendants Sleeman and Messerschmidt interacted with Plaintiff on July 15, 2022 and July 16, 2022, they were on duty and acting under the color of state and local law.

17. At all times that Defendants Sleeman and Messerschmidt interacted with Plaintiff on July 15, 2022 and July 16, 2022, they were acting within the scope of their employment with the State of Wisconsin.

FACTS

18. On July 15, 2022, Melissa Friesema was involved in a traffic stop with a Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Warden that resulted in the DNR warden shooting Melissa Friesema's friend in the head with a gun.

19. Forest County Sheriff's Office, City of Crandon Police Department, and Wisconsin Department of Justice Division of Criminal Investigation law enforcement, including the named defendants in this case, responded to the scene.

20. The above individual Defendants Ronald Skallerud, Alex Walrath, Anthony Crum, Connor Johnson, Darrell Wilson, Thomas Robinson, Jeffrey Marvin, Ryan Wilson, Tami Sleeman, and Brian Messerschmidt conspired with each other in person and by phone to seize Melissa Friesema and her friend's minor daughter M.S. at the scene and at the jail and to seize phones and clothes from M.S. and Friesema, and at least some of the above defendants took the below specific actions in furtherance of this conspiracy by seizing M.S. and Friesema at the scene and seizing their phones and clothes and further seizing them at the jail, preventing them from talking to each other or leaving the jail until they were interviewed by DCI agents Tami Sleeman and Brian Messerschmidt.

21. At the time Defendants detained M.S. and Friesema at the scene and at the jail, they did not have reasonable suspicion to believe M.S. or Friesema had committed, were committing, or were going to commit a crime.

22. While at the scene, after M.S.'s father left in an ambulance, Defendants Skallerud, Walrath, and Johnson spoke to each other, and had a meeting of the minds to detain M.S. and Friesema until they were interviewed, and Walrath specifically told Johnson and Skallerud that they must get a statement from those involved before they are released.

23. While at the scene, after M.S.'s father left in an ambulance, Defendants Skallerud, Walrath, Johnson, and Crum spoke to each other, and had a meeting of the minds to detain M.S. and Friesema until they were interviewed by DCI agents and seize their clothes, and Skallerud specifically told Darrell Wilson that DCI was coming in to take over the investigation so they needed to get M.S. and Friesema in separate vehicles and have someone take them back to the police station and wait for the DCI agents and to also collect their clothes from them.

24. While at the scene, Defendants Crum and Darrell Wilson seized Friesema's and M.S.'s phones.

25. While at the scene, Defendant Darrell Wilson required Friesema to empty her pockets, and he confiscated the contents of her pockets and put them in a bag.

26. Defendant Crum separated M.S. from Friesema and transported M.S. in a squad car from the scene to the Forest County Jail.

27. Defendant Darrell Wilson separated M.S. from Friesema and transported Friesema in a squad car from the scene to the Forest County Jail.

28. While at the Forest County Jail, Defendants Crum and Darrell Wilson required M.S. to take her clothes off and then seized and searched those clothes.

29. Crum instructed Johnson to search a new set of M.S.'s clothing that M.S.'s family had brought to the jail for her to change into, and Johnson proceeded to search M.S.'s new set of clothing.

30. M.S. and Friesema were further detained at the Forest County Jail by defendants Crum, Johnson, Darrell Wilson, Tami Sleeman, and Brian Messerschmidt until State of Wisconsin DCI agents completed their interviews of M.S. and Friesema.

31. M.S. was detained without reasonable suspicion or probable cause for more than four hours.

32. Friesema was detained without reasonable suspicion or probable cause for more than five hours.

33. As a direct and proximate result of the acts of Defendants, as detailed above, Plaintiff suffered, *inter alia*, pain and suffering, mental distress, humiliation, loss of liberty, loss of reputation, and has incurred expenses.

COUNT 1:
42 U.S.C. § 1983 Claim for Unreasonable Search and Seizure

34. Plaintiff realleges the above paragraphs.

35. Defendants Ronald Skallerud, Alex Walrath, Anthony Crum, Connor Johnson, Darrell Wilson, Thomas Robinson, Jeffrey Marvin, Ryan Wilson, Tami Sleeman, and Brian Messerschmidt, while acting under color of law, unreasonably seized Friesema and her property, unreasonably prolonged the suspicionless seizure, and unreasonably searched her property without any other lawful reason to do so, violating Plaintiff's Fourth Amendment right to be free from unreasonable search and seizure and are thus liable for damages under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

36. In the alternative, the above individual Defendants failed to intervene when deputies unreasonably seized Melissa Friesema and her property, unreasonably prolonged the suspicionless seizure, and unreasonably searched her property without any other lawful reason to do so.

37. The aforementioned actions of Defendants were the direct and proximate cause of the constitutional violations set forth above and of Plaintiff's injuries and damages set forth above.

WHEREFORE, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. §§ 1983 & 1988, Plaintiff demands actual or compensatory damages against Defendants Ronald Skallerud, Alex Walrath, Anthony Crum, Connor Johnson, Darrell Wilson, Thomas Robinson, Jeffrey Marvin, Ryan Wilson, Tami Sleeman, and Brian Messerschmidt, and because they acted in reckless disregard for Plaintiff's rights, punitive damages, the costs of this action, attorneys' fees, and such other relief that the Court deems just and equitable.

COUNT 2:
42 U.S.C. § 1983 Claim for False Arrest

38. Plaintiff realleges the above facts.

39. Defendants Ronald Skallerud, Alex Walrath, Anthony Crum, Connor Johnson, Darrell Wilson, Thomas Robinson, Jeffrey Marvin, Ryan Wilson, Tami Sleeman, and Brian Messerschmidt, while acting under color of law, arrested (or failed to intervene in the arrest of) Melissa Friesema without probable cause, violating Plaintiff's Fourth Amendment right to be free from unreasonable search and seizure and are thus liable for damages under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

40. The aforementioned actions of Defendants were the direct and proximate cause of the constitutional violations set forth above and of Plaintiff's injuries and damages set forth above.

WHEREFORE, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. §§ 1983 & 1988, Plaintiff demands actual or compensatory damages against Defendants Ronald Skallerud, Alex Walrath, Anthony Crum, Connor Johnson, Darrell Wilson, Thomas Robinson, Jeffrey Marvin, Ryan Wilson, Tami Sleeman, and Brian Messerschmidt, and because they acted in reckless disregard for Plaintiff's rights, punitive damages, the costs of this action, attorneys' fees, and such other relief that the Court deems just and equitable.

COUNT 3:

42 U.S.C. § 1983 *Monell* Claim for Unconstitutional Policy or Failure to Train, Supervise, or Discipline against Forest County and City of Crandon

41. Plaintiff realleges the above paragraphs.

42. The actions of the above Defendants in unreasonably seizing Melissa Friesema, unreasonably prolonging the suspicionless seizure, or failing to intervene in the unreasonable seizure, and seizing and searching her clothes and phone without a warrant and without any other lawful reason, violated Plaintiff's Fourth Amendment rights and thus violated 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

43. At the time, Defendant Forest County and City of Crandon had a policy of allowing its law enforcement officers, including Defendants Ronald Skallerud, Alex Walrath, Anthony Crum, Connor Johnson, Darrell Wilson, Thomas Robinson, Jeffrey Marvin, and Ryan Wilson, to seize people without reasonable suspicion, seize witnesses for

unreasonable lengths of time, arrest witnesses without probable cause, and seize and search items from witnesses without warrants or an exception to the warrant requirement.

44. At the time, Defendant Forest County and City of Crandon had a custom of allowing these unreasonable seizures. Forest County and City of Crandon knew that its law enforcement officers were illegally seizing witnesses and items from witnesses and allowed the practice to continue.

45. Forest County and City of Crandon failed to adequately train, supervise, and discipline Defendants Ronald Skallerud, Alex Walrath, Anthony Crum, Connor Johnson, Darrell Wilson, Thomas Robinson, Jeffrey Marvin, and Ryan Wilson.

46. Forest County and City of Crandon knew that it was highly predictable that Defendants would continue to illegally seize witnesses and items from witnesses.

47. Ronald Skallerud, in his role as the Sheriff of Forest County at the time of this incident, was the chief policymaker for Forest County on decisions on how and when to seize witnesses and items from witnesses.

48. Skallerud was directly involved in seizing Melissa Friesema, unreasonably prolonging the suspicionless seizure, or failing to intervene in the unreasonable seizure, and seizing her clothes and phone without a warrant and without any other lawful reason.

49. The direct involvement of Defendant Skallerud was the moving force and the direct and proximate cause of the constitutional violations set forth above and of Plaintiff's injuries and damages set forth above.

50. The aforementioned policies, customs, and failures in training, supervision, and discipline were the direct and proximate cause of the constitutional violations set forth above and of Plaintiff's injuries and damages set forth above.

WHEREFORE, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. §§ 1983 & 1988, Plaintiff demands actual or compensatory damages against Forest County and City of Crandon plus the costs of this action, attorneys' fees; and such other relief that the Court deems just and equitable.

**COUNT 4:
Indemnification Claim Against Forest County and City of Crandon**

51. Plaintiff realleges the above paragraphs.

52. Wisconsin law, WIS. STAT. § 895.46, requires public entities to pay any tort judgment for damages for which employees are liable, for acts within the scope of their employment.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff asks this Court to find that Forest County is liable to defend this action against Defendants Ronald Skallerud, Alex Walrath, Anthony Crum, Connor Johnson, Darrell Wilson, Thomas Robinson, and Jeffrey Marvin, and that and City of Crandon is liable to defend this action against Defendant Ryan Wilson and to satisfy any judgment entered against them, by virtue of WIS. STAT. § 895.46.

JURY DEMAND

Plaintiff hereby demands a trial by jury, pursuant to FED. R. CIV. PRO. 38(b), on all issues so triable.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: 14 July 2025,

STRANG BRADLEY, LLC

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