IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE AT GREENEVILLE

KEVIN PARSONS

Plaintiff

v.

EDWARD TESTER, JOSHUA PETERS, THOMAS BROWN, JOSHUA FERGUSON, EVAN MARTIN, RAYMOND MINK, BRADLEY SEXTON, RYAN ROSIER,

and

JOHNSON COUNTY, TENNESSEE

Defendants

COMPLAINT

The Plaintiff, Kevin Parsons, hereby brings suit against the Defendants as follows:

PARTIES

1) During the events described herein, Plaintiff KEVIN PARSONS, was a citizen of

Johnson County, Tennessee. He also was (and still is) the Mayor of its county seat, Mountain City.

2) Defendant EDWARD ("EDDIE") TESTER is the Sheriff of Johnson County. He is

2:19-cv-225

being sued individually.

3) During the events described, Defendants JOSHUA PETERS, THOMAS ("T.J.") BROWN, JOSHUA FERGUSON, EVAN MARTIN, RAYMOND ("R.J.") MINK, and BRADLEY SEXTON were Sheriff's deputies of Johnson County. They are being sued individually.

4) Defendant RYAN ROSIER is an officer with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency who routinely works alongside the Johnson County Sheriff's Department for traffic stops and other events.

5) Defendant JOHNSON COUNTY, TENNESSEE is a political subdivision of the state of Tennessee. It is named as a Defendant.

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

6) On December 22, 2018, Mayor KEVIN PARSONS was traveling and minding his own business within Johnson County, Tennessee when Sergeant JOSHUA PETERS pulled him over.

7) Prior to this traffic stop, Sergeant PETERS could see that there was a passenger in the car with PARSONS. However, he could not see who the passenger was.

8) The official justification for this traffic stop was that PARSONS was speeding.

9) In reality, the deputy never even measured the car's speed.

10) Instead, he just stopped the car because he wanted to check the driver license of the passenger.

11) Stopping vehicles at random in order to check driver licenses is actually a

common pastime and standard practice of the Johnson County Sheriff's Department.

12) At the beginning of this particular stop, Plaintiff PARSONS was ready to provide his own driver's license. However, it was never even requested. The deputy already knew who he was, anyway, since he was the Mayor of Mountain City.

13) In fact, the deputy pulled him over *because* he recognized him as the Mayor of Mountain City.

14) Instead of asking for information about the driver, PETERS just demanded the driver's license of the *passenger*.

15) In response, the passenger declined to provide any driver's license.

16) Likewise, PARSONS declined to identify his passenger.

17) Sergeant PETERS demanded that this driver identify his passenger.

18) PARSONS still declined. He told the deputy that the government did not have any right to a passenger's information.

19) He then asked if they were free to leave, but the deputy said they were *not* free, until he could identify all occupants of the vehicle.

20) After being denied the freedom to leave, PARSONS phoned the Sheriff himself. He asked Sheriff EDDIE TESTER the legal question at issue: Is a driver required to identify his passenger?

21) Sheriff TESTER is a final policymaker for JOHNSON COUNTY, TENNESSEE.

22) At this point, Sheriff TESTER answered that no, the driver was not required to identify his passenger.

23) Therefore, PARSONS asked if the Sheriff could please educate his deputy on this

legal issue.

24) Sheriff TESTER then spoke to the deputy by phone. After doing so, the Sheriff drove to the scene personally.

25) Instead of setting the deputy straight, though, Sheriff TESTER quickly joined in. He continued to seize the driver and the passenger, and he demanded that PARSONS identify his passenger.

26) Even after the Sheriff arrived, PARSONS still refused to identify his passenger.

27) Altogether, no steps were taken during this "traffic stop" to prosecute any traffic violations.

28) For example, the officer(s) never attempted to examine any insurance paperwork.

29) No one attempted to examine the license of the driver.

30) No one called in a warrants check on the driver.

31) No one ever started writing a traffic ticket.

32) Eventually, the officers revealed to PARSONS that there was a warrant out for his brother-in-law, for unpaid child support. They clarified that they were wondering if the passenger might be this brother-in-law.

33) At the same time that the officers revealed their suspicion, Sergeant PETERS threatened to charge PARSONS with a felony if he did not identify the passenger, if it turned out that the passenger was indeed the brother-in-law.

34) Upon being told of the suspicion, and upon hearing the threat of a felony charge,PARSONS acknowledged that the passenger was indeed his brother-in-law.

35) PETERS and TESTER then arrested the passenger. PARSONS himself was

released, without ever being cited for anything.

36) Unfortunately, Sheriff TESTER had taken office in September 2018, and unbeknownst to PARSONS, during the election season he had made a special promise to his campaign supporters: Once elected Sheriff, he would indict the Mayor of Mountain City.

37) Around the same time that Sheriff TESTER took office, he had knowingly employed a former employee of the Mountain City Police Department.

38) Namely, "T.J." BROWN had formerly worked for the Mountain City Police Department, under Mayor PARSONS. But when the City Council declined to authorize funding for a new drug dog during the fall of 2018, he became disgruntled, accused Mayor PARSONS of trafficking drugs, and quit the force.

39) In response to these unsubstantiated allegations of drug trafficking, on September 10, 2018, PARSONS had filed a complaint against this officer for slander. He had specifically delivered a copy to the officer's new employer — the Sheriff.

40) Sheriff TESTER had ignored the allegation of misconduct against BROWN, and had nonetheless hired, retained, and declined to discipline the new deputy.

41) Two days after that complaint, BROWN had harassed the Plaintiff's daughter at the local high school. In the parking lot, he had run his uncertified drug dog around her vehicle. After doing so, he pretended that this dog had sniffed drugs inside the car. Then he interrogated the girl about these supposed drugs. The interrogation only ended after the assistant principal ordered him off the premises.

42) The Johnson County Sheriff's Department has three drug dogs. None of them are certified as being reliable.

43) Still, JOHNSON COUNTY routinely uses these dogs to search people's cars.

44) Getting back to the "traffic stop" in question (December 22, 2018), two weeks went by following this stop, without further incident.

45) But on January 08, 2019, Deputy PETERS swore out an arrest warrant against PARSONS for his conduct during the stop. The alleged crime was that PARSONS had failed to identify his passenger, and/or had supposedly told the officers, "I don't know," when asked who his passenger was.

46) In reality, PARSONS never even said "I don't know," at least not in reference to the passenger's identity. Instead, he just declined to reveal the passenger's name.

47) The affidavit of complaint also claimed that PARSONS already knew (prior to the stop) that his brother-in-law had an outstanding warrant.

48) This allegation was false or misleading because PARSONS had actually been informed about the outstanding warrant (by PETERS) roughly *seven months* prior. That is, he had known about it once in the past, but the information was completely stale. And during the stop, PARSONS had no reason to suspect that the warrant was still outstanding.

49) As listed on the affidavit of complaint, the criminal charge for PARSONS was simply called "Obstruction of Justice." Other than this name, the affidavit merely cited Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-16-602 — a statute which contains more than one chargeable crime.

50) "Obstruction of Justice" is not even the name of *any* offense in Tennessee. The charge was simply listed that way in order to smear the Mayor.

51) Although the Mayor was no flight risk on this misdemeanor charge, PETERS specifically chose to take out an arrest warrant, instead of a criminal summons. He did so using a

state-law procedure whereby the judicial commissioner had no option but to issue a summons. *See* Tenn. Code Ann. § 40-6-215(a)(1).

52) Regardless, the judicial commissioner in question also had a policy, which he has admitted, of *always* approving every warrant presented to him by any law enforcement officer. He does not actually judge whether probable cause exists.

53) Further, this judicial commissioner has never, in thirty years, taken a single hour of continuing legal education, even though ten hours of CLE have been required by statute, yearly, since 2010. *See* Tenn. Code Ann. § 40-1-111(f).

54) Nonetheless, JOHNSON COUNTY has continued employing this defective judicial commissioner for decades, paying him out of the county budget.

55) So after getting their "Obstruction of Justice" warrant from this defective judicial commissioner, Deputies JOSHUA PETERS, T.J. BROWN, JOSHUA FERGUSON, EVAN MARTIN, R.J. MINK, BRADLEY SEXTON, and Officer RYAN ROSIER all met together to ambush PARSONS in the parking lot of City Hall.

56) Specifically, they wanted to make a public spectacle by arresting the Mayor, right before a City Council meeting.

57) The officers were wearing full S.W.A.T. gear.

58) They arrested PARSONS just as he was arriving at City Hall to preside over a meeting. They told him that he would not be attending the meeting.

59) The Sheriff did not personally show up to this spectacle, but upon information and belief, he conspired with the other officers to do the deed.

60) During the arrest, the deputies would not tell PARSONS what he was being

arrested for, or show him the warrant.

61) By keeping things ambiguous, the officers thereby added to the mystery and the public spectacle.

62) After PARSONS was handcuffed and locked in a police car, PETERS, BROWN, FERGUSON, MARTIN, MINK, SEXTON, and ROSIER all searched his car.

63) There was no probable cause to think that any evidence was inside.

64) There was no warrant to search the car.

65) The car was searched either to look randomly for drugs, or else to give the *appearance* of suspecting drugs.

66) After the officers had entered the car, they let one of their uncertified drug dogs inside the car to look for drugs.

67) In the process, the beast tore into the inside of the Plaintiff's car, damaging his property.

68) Ultimately, PARSONS spent hours in jail, before making bond.

69) Although the warrant read simply "Obstruction of Justice," at the preliminary hearing, the criminal prosecutor would later clarify that the charge was Obstruction of Service of Process. The crime is a Class B misdemeanor. *See* Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-16-602(c).

70) Over a year before this arrest, the Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals had already held that Obstruction of Service of Process only occurs if someone commits an "overt act" to prevent service of such civil process. *State v. Burgess*, 532 S.W.3d 372, 391-392 (Tenn. 2017). Under this binding opinion, "mere concealment" of the person to be served was ruled insufficient to charge an offense. *Id*.

71) No overt acts were charged here.

72) In light of the elements of the offense, and especially in light of the appellate court opinion, the affidavit of complaint plainly did not charge any crime against PARSONS.

73) At the preliminary hearing, a special general sessions judge (imported from a different county) reviewed the dashboard video, other evidence, and arguments of the parties. Then he dismissed the charge for lack of probable cause. The dismissal happened on May 29, 2019.

74) All the violation(s) as charged in this complaint were committed intentionally, maliciously, and/or recklessly, warranting the imposition of punitive damages.

75) At all times, these Defendants were acting under color of law, either as a government entity (JOHNSON COUNTY) or as law enforcement officers (everyone else).

76) As a result of the wrongdoing charged herein, PARSONS has suffered humiliation, loss of business income, and emotional distress.

CLAIMS FOR RELIEF

COUNT I UNREASONABLE SEARCH AND SEIZURE 42 U.S.C. § 1983

(Tester, Peters, and Johnson County)

77) The other sections are incorporated by reference.

78) By stopping the Plaintiff on December 22, 2018 without probable cause, in order to check the identity of his passenger, under color of law Defendants JOSHUA PETERS and EDDIE TESTER violated the Plaintiff's Fourth Amendment right to be free from unreasonable

searches and seizures.

79) JOHNSON COUNTY is liable for this misconduct because the Sheriff, a final policymaker, personally participated in it.

80) Further, JOHNSON COUNTY is also liable because the Johnson County Sheriff's Department routinely carries out these unlawful stops as a matter of practice.

COUNT II FALSE ARREST 42 U.S.C. § 1983

(All Defendants)

81) The other sections are incorporated by reference.

- 82) By arresting the Plaintiff on January 08, 2019, without probable cause and based on a facially invalid warrant, under color of law Defendants JOSHUA PETERS, T.J. BROWN, JOSHUA FERGUSON, EVAN MARTIN, R.J. MINK, BRADLEY SEXTON, and RYAN ROSIER all violated the Plaintiff's Fourth Amendment right to be free from unreasonable searches.

83) Sheriff EDDIE TESTER is also liable for the misconduct because he conspired with PETERS and BROWN to arrest the Plaintiff. The conspiracy is evidenced by his own prior statements pledging to indict the Plaintiff in the absence of probable cause, his ongoing associations with Officer BROWN who had publicly slandered and harassed the Plaintiff, his personal involvement in the illegal roadside encounter by PETERS that was the subject of this warrant, and the two-week delay between that event and the criminal prosecution.

84) JOHNSON COUNTY is liable for this misconduct because the Sheriff, a final

policymaker, personally participated in it through the aforesaid conspiracy.

85) Further, JOHNSON COUNTY is also liable because it employs a defective judicial commissioner who is neither competent, nor neutral and detached, all in deliberate indifference to the rights of the criminally accused within Johnson County.

COUNT III MALICIOUS PROSECUTION 42 U.S.C. § 1983

(Tester, Peters, and Johnson County)

86) The other sections are incorporated by reference.

87) Alternatively, by arresting the Plaintiff on January 08, 2019 based on a warrant whose probable cause was procured through his own intentional or reckless falsehoods and misleading statements, Defendant PETERS violated the Plaintiff's Fourth Amendment right to be free from unreasonable seizures under color of law.

88) Sheriff TESTER is liable for the misconduct because he conspired with PETERS and BROWN to arrest the Plaintiff. (*See* ¶ 83).

89) JOHNSON COUNTY is also liable for the misconduct because the Sheriff, a final policymaker, participated in it through this conspiracy.

COUNT IV RETALIATORY ARREST AND PROSECUTION 42 U.S.C. § 1983

(Tester, Peters, and Johnson County)

90) The other sections are incorporated by reference.

91) By arresting and prosecuting the Plaintiff on January 08, 2019 in retaliation for invoking his Fifth Amendment right to remain silent, and/or for freely telling the officers under the First Amendment that they were behaving wrongly, under color of law Defendant PETERS violated the Fifth and First Amendments.

92) Sheriff TESTER is also liable for the misconduct because he conspired with PETERS and BROWN to arrest the Plaintiff. (*See* ¶ 83).

93) JOHNSON COUNTY is liable for this misconduct because the Sheriff, a final policymaker, personally participated in it.

COUNT V MALICIOUS PROSECUTION TENNESSEE COMMON LAW

(Tester and Peters)

94) The other sections are incorporated by reference.

95) By maliciously instituting the legal proceeding against the Plaintiff without probable cause, which was later dismissed involuntarily in the Plaintiff's favor, Defendant PETERS committed the common-law tort of malicious prosecution.

96) Sheriff TESTER is also liable for the misconduct because he conspired with PETERS and BROWN to arrest the Plaintiff. (*See* ¶ 83).

COUNT VI UNREASONABLE SEARCH 42 U.S.C. § 1983

(All Defendants)

97) The other sections are incorporated by reference.

98) By searching the Plaintiff's car on January 08, 2019 without probable cause or any other justification, Defendants PETERS, BROWN, FERGUSON, MARTIN, MINK, SEXTON, and ROSIER all violated the Plaintiff's right under the Fourth Amendment to be free of unlawful searches.

99) Sheriff TESTER is liable for the misconduct because he conspired with PETERS and BROWN, and is therefore liable for all the results of the conspiracy. (*See* ¶ 83).

100) JOHNSON COUNTY is liable for the misconduct because the Sheriff, a final policymaker, participated in it through this conspiracy.

101) JOHNSON COUNTY is also liable because it has a widespread practice of using uncertified drug dogs to search people's cars illegally.

JURISDICTION

102) The federal Court has subject-matter jurisdiction because the civil rights claims listed are based on 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a federal question, and the state-law claims are based on the same facts and covered by the Court's supplemental jurisdiction.

103) This Court (in Tennessee) has personal jurisdiction because the Defendants are either citizens of Tennessee, or else have sufficient contacts with Tennessee that traditional notions of fair play allow for jurisdiction in this state.

104) Venue is proper in the Eastern District of Tennessee (Greeneville Division) because the incidents happened in Johnson County, Tennessee.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff Kevin Parsons asks for the following:

- i) Nominal/compensatory damages of \$750,000,
- ii) Punitive damages above that amount,
- iii) Reasonable attorney's fees, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1988, and
- iv) Any futher relief that the Court deems appropriate.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Drew Justice

Drew Justice #29247 Attorney for the Plaintiff 1902 Cypress Drive Murfreesboro, TN 37130 (615) 419-4994 drew@justicelawoffice.com

CIVIL COVER SHEET

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. *(SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON NEXT PAGE OF THIS FORM.)*

I. (a) PLAINTIFFS				DEFENDANTS			
KEVIN PARSONS				EDWARD TESTER, JOSHUA PETERS, THOMAS BROWN, JOSHUA FERGUSON, EVAN MARTIN, RAYMOND MINK, BRADLEY SEXTON, RYAN ROSIER, JOHNSON COUNTY TENNESSEE			
(b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff Johnson (TN)				County of Residence of First Listed Defendant Johnson (TN)			
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					ONDEMNATION CASES, USE T OF LAND INVOLVED.	THE LOCATION OF	
(c) Attorneys (Firm Name, Address, and Telephone Number) Drew Justice #29247, The Justice Law Office, 1902 Cypress Drive				Attorneys (If Known)			
Drew Justice #29247, Tr Murfreesboro, TN 37130							
II. BASIS OF JURISD	ICTION (Place an "X" in C	ne Box Only)	III. CI	TIZENSHIP OF P	RINCIPAL PARTIES	(Place an "X" in One Box for Plaintiff	
□ 1 U.S. Government				(For Diversity Cases Only) and One Box for Defendant) PTF DEF PTF DEF			
Plaintiff			Citizen of This State Citizen of This State Citize				
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				Citizen or Subject of a Foreign Country			
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□ 120 Marine	310 Airplane	□ 365 Personal Injury -		of Property 21 USC 881	423 Withdrawal	376 Qui Tam (31 USC)	
 130 Miller Act 140 Negotiable Instrument 	315 Airplane Product Liability	Product Liability 367 Health Care/	□ 69	0 Other	28 USC 157	3729(a)) 400 State Reapportionment	
150 Recovery of Overpayment & Enforcement of Judgment	□ 320 Assault, Libel & Slander	Pharmaceutical Personal Injury			PROPERTY RIGHTS ☐ 820 Copyrights	 410 Antitrust 430 Banks and Banking 	
□ 151 Medicare Act	330 Federal Employers'	Product Liability			□ 830 Patent	□ 450 Commerce	
152 Recovery of Defaulted Student Loans	Liability 340 Marine	368 Asbestos Personal Injury Product			840 Trademark	 460 Deportation 470 Racketeer Influenced and 	
(Excludes Veterans)	□ 345 Marine Product	Liability		LABOR 0 Fair Labor Standards	SOCIAL SECURITY	Corrupt Organizations 480 Consumer Credit	
153 Recovery of Overpayment of Veteran's Benefits	Liability 350 Motor Vehicle	PERSONAL PROPER ☐ 370 Other Fraud		Act	□ 861 HIA (1395ff) □ 862 Black Lung (923)	□ 480 Consumer Credit □ 490 Cable/Sat TV	
 160 Stockholders' Suits 190 Other Contract 	355 Motor Vehicle Product Liability	 371 Truth in Lending 380 Other Personal 	1 72	0 Labor/Management Relations	 863 DIWC/DIWW (405(g)) 864 SSID Title XVI 	850 Securities/Commodities/ Exchange	
195 Contract Product Liability	360 Other Personal	Property Damage		0 Railway Labor Act	□ 865 RSI (405(g))	890 Other Statutory Actions	
□ 196 Franchise	Injury 362 Personal Injury -	385 Property Damage Product Liability		1 Family and Medical Leave Act		 891 Agricultural Acts 893 Environmental Matters 	
REAL PROPERTY	Medical Malpractice CIVIL RIGHTS	PRISONER PETITION		0 Other Labor Litigation 1 Employee Retirement	FEDERAL TAX SUITS	895 Freedom of Information Act	
210 Land Condemnation	🛪 440 Other Civil Rights	Habeas Corpus:		Income Security Act	870 Taxes (U.S. Plaintiff	896 Arbitration	
 220 Foreclosure 230 Rent Lease & Ejectment 	 441 Voting 442 Employment 	 463 Alien Detainee 510 Motions to Vacate 			or Defendant) 871 IRS—Third Party	899 Administrative Procedure Act/Review or Appeal of	
□ 240 Torts to Land	443 Housing/	Sentence			26 USC 7609	Agency Decision	
 245 Tort Product Liability 290 All Other Real Property 	Accommodations 445 Amer. w/Disabilities -	 530 General 535 Death Penalty 		IMMIGRATION		950 Constitutionality of State Statutes	
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V. ORIGIN (Place an "X" i	n One Box Only)	Commentati				1	
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VI. CAUSE OF ACTION	42 U S C 1983 (utute under which you ar also supplemental j		Do not cite jurisdictional stat			
VI. CAUSE OF ACTION	brief description of ca		ion x 2	Retaliatory Arrest (1	st Am, and 5th Am.). Ur	reasonable Search of Car	
VII. REQUESTED IN CHECK IF THIS IS A CLASS ACTION				2, Retaliatory Arrest (1st Am. and 5th Am.), Unreasonable Search of Car DEMAND \$ CHECK YES only if demanded in complaint:			
COMPLAINT: UNDER RULE 23, F.R.Cv.P.				750,000.00	JURY DEMAND	· .	
VIII. RELATED CASI IF ANY	E(S) (See instructions):	JUDGE			DOCKET NUMBER		
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