

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS

COUNTY OF CHESTER

CIVIL ACTION NO: 2018-CP-12-00117

Heidi Gersten, Ivanka Ayoub, Daniel Hubbard,

CIVIL ACTION NO: 2018-CP-12-00074

Plaintiffs,

ORDER GRANTING DEFENDANT INTERINSURANCE EXCHANGE OF THE AUTOMOBILE CLUB'S MOTION TO DISMISS

vs.

Kevin Carter, Richard Davis, Joseph Tirbovich, Nationwide Insurance Company, Interinsurance Exchange of the Automobile Club, John Ammendola, Trustguard Ins. Co., Blackwell, SC Department of Public Safety, Chevrolet, GMC, Unknown John Does,

Defendants.

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SC Court of Appeals

This matter comes before the Court upon Defendant Interinsurance Exchange of the Automobile Club's ("AAA") Motions to Dismiss, to Strike, and to change venue. The Court held a hearing on its and the other Defendants' motions on September 5, 2018. All served Defendant's appeared by and through their attorneys and Plaintiffs Gersten and Ayoub appeared *pro se*; Plaintiff Hubbard did not appear. For the reasons set forth below, Defendant AAA's principal motions are granted.

PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND

This action arises out of an automobile collision that took place on March 19, 2015 between Ivanka Ayoub's vehicle operated by Heidi Gersten, and a vehicle both operated and owned by Kevin Carter. Plaintiff Gersten originally filed a property damage arbitration claim on February 21, 2018 (hereinafter "Arbitration Action"). The claim named Kevin Carter, Richard

Davis, Nationwide Mutual Insurance Company, Interinsurance of the Automobile Club, and Trustguard Insurance as defendants.

Gersten then created a "First Amended Claim for Property Damage Verified" (hereinafter "Amended Arbitration Complaint") on or about March 2, 2018, however, she did not then file the Amended Arbitration Complaint. The Trided Arbitration Complaint added Gersten's mother, Ivanka Ayoub, as a claimant and added Joseph Tirbovich and John Ammendola as additional defendants. Gersten and Ayoub never obtained an Amended Summons listing Ayoub as a claimant, and the Amended Arbitration Complaint was not filed until March 27, 2018.

On March 16, 2018, Gersten, Ayoub, and Daniel Hubbard filed the above-captioned case in this court seeking recovery for injuries arising out of the collision. In addition to the defendants named in the Amended Arbitration Complaint, the Plaintiffs named the South Carolina Department of Public Safety, Blackwell (*sic*), Chevrolet, GMC, and unknown John Doe defendants.

Kevin Carter, Richard Davis, and the other Defendants who have allegedly been served in the case filed motions to dismiss both cases.¹ AAA sought to dismiss the Arbitration Action, in part, claiming the arbitration panel lacked jurisdiction over some of the claims asserted in the Arbitration Action. On April 26, 2018, Judge Gibbons, acting as the Chief Administrative Judge for Chester County Circuit Court, entered an Order finding the claims asserted in the Arbitration Action were outside the scope of arbitration. He transferred the Arbitration Action to the Common Pleas docket and consolidated the case with the Circuit Court action. (April 26, 2018 Form 4 Order). Because the cases have been consolidated, this Order will address the allegations

¹ The Court has no record of Blackwell, GMC, Chevrolet or any John Doe defendants being served. Furthermore, John Ammendola and Joseph Tirbovich deny that they have been served.

set forth in the Circuit Court Complaint. However, the Court has reviewed all three Complaints, and the Court's ruling would be the same regardless which pleading(s) were in effect.

This case was set for hearing on the various pending motions for September 5, 2018. The case was also placed on the non-jury roster for a merits hearing for the same week. Plaintiff Heidi Gersten filed a motion for continuance. At the hearing, all defendants consented to continuing the merits hearing of the case but requested that the motions be heard. Gersten and Ayoub consented to proceeding with hearing the various motions.

LAW

AAA's Motion to Dismiss seeks the following relief:

- a) Dismissal of all claims asserted against it for failing to state facts constituting a cause of action,
- b) Dismissal for a lack of standing to pursue the claim asserted claims,
- c) Dismissal of Daniel Hubbard's claims,
- d) Dismissal of Ivanka Ayoub's claims,
- e) That certain specified allegations be stricken,
- f) Dismissal for lack of *in personam* jurisdiction, and a
- g) Change of Venue

The Court will address each item in turn.

A. All Causes of Action

The Complaint numbers eighteen separate causes of action. Except for the negligence claim, these causes of action merely allege the legal elements of various other causes of action, and some fail to even allege the basic legal elements.

Exactly four *facts* in its almost five score paragraphs are germane to AAA:

- At Paragraph 6, that AAA is a North Carolina Company,

- At 10, the collision occurred in Chester County,
- At 14, the date and time of the accident, and
- At 18, Gersten was insured for liability by AAA.

Rule 8(a) SCRPC states that a pleading setting forth a cause of action “shall contain . . . a short and plain statement of the facts showing the pleader is entitled to relief.” Rule 8(a), SCRPC. In reviewing a motion to dismiss pursuant to Rule 12(b)(6), the Court’s analysis is limited solely to the Complaint itself, and no other documents may be considered. *See Woodell by Allen v. Marion School Dist. One*, 307 S.C. 297, 298, 414 S.E.2d 794, 794 (Ct. App. 1992). Moreover, a “trial court must dismiss a claim pursuant to Rule 12(b)(6) of the South Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure, if the pleadings, when taken in the light most favorable to the plaintiff, fail to allege sufficient facts to constitute a cause of action.” *Trancik v. USAA Ins. Co.*, 354 S.C. 549, 552, 581 S.E.2d 858, 860 (Ct. App. 2003).

These facts do not constitute any cause of action against AAA. They do not specify any acts of negligence, nor describe the essential allegations of fraud, nor any false statement, nor any deceitful act, nor any conduct at all entitling the Plaintiffs to relief of any kind. The facts simply do not constitute a cause of action against AAA, so the Complaint against it must be dismissed.

B. Standing

The Plaintiffs argue they have asserted a cause of action against AAA. To the extent they seek to assert third-party claims against such a liability insurer, they lack standing to do so. *Kleckley v. Northwestern Nat. Cas. Co.*, 526 S.E.2d 218, 219 (S.C. 2000). In *Kleckley*, the Supreme Court held that third-party claimants have no standing to pursue a cause of action

against a liability insurer. Alternatively, even if the court were to have held that facts constituting a cause of action had been stated and that one or more of the Plaintiffs could continue its suit against the AAA, that suit would have been severed from the negligence claim. Allowing the two causes of action to go forward together would present a honey pot of potential prejudice and inefficiency which this court would avoid. **SCRCP, Rules 20 and 21.**

C. Daniel Hubbard's claims.

AAA moved to dismiss Daniel Hubbard's claims because South Carolina does not recognize a cause of action for loss of a sibling's *consortium*. The attorney for AAA exhibited to the court a letter mailing notice of this hearing to Hubbard with notice to him that it intended to move for a dismissal if he did not appear.

Daniel Hubbard did not appear for the hearing on the Motion to Dismiss. Therefore, his claims are **dismissed** for failure to prosecute pursuant to Rule 41(b), SCRCP.²

D. Consortium claims.

Only Plaintiff Gersten claims to be an insured of the AAA. Ayoub and Hubbard are total strangers to the AAA, the AAA was not involved in the accident, and the only complaint they make are for maternal or filial loss of *consortium*, respectively. Plaintiff Ayoub, the mother of Plaintiff Gersten, was not involved in the accident but the Complaint alleges that she "suffers, among other things, loss of consortium." Plaintiff Hubbard, Gersten's brother, alleges he "was unable to work for a period and, accordingly, loss (*sic*) wages... ." He was not involved in the accident.

² Even had Hubbard appeared at the hearing, his claim would fail for the reasons set out below.

Our Supreme Court has refused to recognize a cause of action for maternal or filial loss of *consortium*. South Carolina does recognize loss of spousal *consortium*, but that cause of action was expressly created: **SC Code Ann. 15-75-20**. The Supreme Court has held that the absence of a similar statutory cause of action for other loss of *consortia* is persuasive evidence that the General Assembly did not intend to recognize any such causes of action.

In *Taylor v. Medenica*, this Court held that the determination of which relationships may give rise to a loss of consortium claim in South Carolina is one best left to the discretion of the legislature. 479 S.E.2d 35, 47 (S.C. 1996) (declining to recognize a cause of action for loss of parental consortium). The United States District Court for the District of South Carolina adopted the *Taylor* analysis in finding that South Carolina law did not provide a cause of action for loss of consortium of a child or for filial consortium. *Kirkland v. Sam's East, Inc.*, 411 F.Supp. 2d 639, 641 (D.S.C. 2005). Today, we extend our *Taylor* analysis in holding that South Carolina law does not recognize claims for loss of filial consortium. Such rights did not exist under the common law, and the legislature has not provided such a right by statute.

Doe v. Greenville Cty. School District 651 S.E.2d 305, 308 (S.C. 2007)

The claims by Ayoub and Hubbard are hereby **dismissed**.

E. *In Personam* Jurisdiction

The Affidavit of Gail C. Louis, the Secretary of AAA, makes it clear that AAA does not have minimum contacts with South Carolina. Indeed, it has no contacts with South Carolina; no office, no business conducted, no insureds, no property, and no activity. Neither does the Complaint allege that AAA committed a tort within this state. Thus, the Complaint against AAA is **dismissed** because this court lacks personal jurisdiction.

F. Striking Allegations

In view of the other rulings made herein, this court need not reach, so it does not address the AAA motions made to strike various allegations. Such motions are thereby moot.

G. Change of Venue

Similarly this court need not reach, so it does not address, the AAA motion made to change the venue of the trial as it is also moot.

H. All Other Causes of Action asserted by Gersten

The existence of insurance is inadmissible in a tort suit. **Rule 411 SCRE.** Such mentions are highly prejudicial and there can be no doubt that reason and authority expressly forbid bringing into evidence or argument the fact that any defendant is protected by liability insurance. *Hartford v. Carolina Glass Co.*, 75 S.E.2d 533, 541 (S.C. 1912); *Landry v. Hilton Head Plantation Prop. Owners Ass'n, Inc.*, 452 S.E.2d 619, 622 (S.C. App. 1994); *Norris v. Ferre*, 432 S.E.2d 491, 493 (S.C. App. 1993) ("Furthermore, the Supreme Court has been meticulous in keeping the issue of insurance coverage away from the jury"). Since the existence of insurance is inadmissible, AAA must be stricken as a defendant and all allegations against it, to the extent there were any surviving, would have been stricken.

CONCLUSION

For the above-stated reasons, the Court finds AAA's Motions are granted in part and mooted in part. It is ORDERED, ADJUDGED, and DECREED that:

- 1) All causes of action asserted against AAA are dismissed pursuant to Rule 12(b)(6), SCRPC.
- 2) All causes of action asserted against AAA are dismissed for lack of personal jurisdiction by this court.
- 3) The causes of action asserted by Daniel Hubbard are dismissed pursuant to Rule 41(b), SCRPC for failure to prosecute.
- 4) Ivanka Ayoub's & Danial Hubbard's loss of consortium claims are dismissed pursuant to Rule 12(b)(6), SCRPC because South Carolina does not recognize a claim for filial or maternal loss of *consortium*.
- 5) All causes of action against AAA are dismissed because it would not be permissible to try them with the claims against the negligence Defendants.
- 6) AAA's Motions to Strike are denied as moot.
- 7) AAA's Motion to Change Venue is denied as moot.

It is so ORDERED.

John C. Hayes, III
Circuit Court Judge

_____, SC

_____, 2018



Chester Common Pleas

Case Caption: Heidi Gersten , plaintiff, et al VS Kevin Carter , defendant, et al
Case Number: 2018CP1200117
Type: Order/Dismissal

So Ordered

s/John C. Hayes III 2049

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John C. Hayes III
Clerk of Court
Chester Co. PA
8-5-2022

