

Strickland v. Rueger et al - Civil Rights Complaint

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF MINNESOTA

Kellye Strickland,
Plaintiff,

v.

Nicole Rueger, also known as Nikki, in her individual and official capacity as Clerk of
Court;

Elizabeth Clysdale, in her official capacity as District Judge;

Donald Harper, in his individual and official capacity as Court Administrator;

Deputy Corina Loya, in her individual capacity;

Ramsey County Sheriff's Office,

and

John and Jane Does 110, unidentified court and sheriff personnel involved in the violations
described herein,

Defendants.

Case No.:

COMPLAINT FOR INJUNCTIVE RELIEF, COMPENSATORY AND PUNITIVE DAMAGES
JURY TRIAL DEMANDED

I. INTRODUCTION

This is a civil rights action brought under 42 U.S.C. Section 1983, the Fourteenth Amendment
of the United States Constitution, and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA),
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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT - DISTRICT OF MINNESOTA

U.S.C. Section 12132. Plaintiff Kellye Strickland, an autistic and permanently disabled
resident of Arizona, brings this action against officials and entities of the Ramsey County
Second Judicial District for denying her due process, access to the courts, and equal
protection under the law.

Defendants issued a Harassment Restraining Order (HRO) without valid service, denied
Plaintiff's timely legal responses, mishandled or suppressed her filings, and disclosed her
protected address to an adverse party after explicitly assuring her of safety. These actions
caused lasting constitutional, emotional, reputational, and financial harm. Plaintiff seeks
declaratory and injunctive relief, compensatory and punitive damages, and attorney fees and
costs.

II. JURISDICTION AND VENUE

Jurisdiction is proper under 28 U.S.C. Subsection 1331 and 1343(a)(3) as this action arises
under the Constitution and laws of the United States.

Venue is proper in this district under 28 U.S.C. Section 1391(b) as the events giving rise to
these claims occurred in Ramsey County, Minnesota.

III. PARTIES

Plaintiff Kellye Strickland is a permanently and totally disabled adult residing in Tempe, Arizona. She receives Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) based on diagnoses of PTSD and Bipolar Disorder. Her conditions have been known to the defendants, including the petitioner Madeline Sally Lee, through prior communications and court filings.

Defendant Elizabeth Clysdale is a judge in the Second Judicial District of Minnesota and is sued in her official capacity.

Defendant Donald Harper is the Court Administrator for Ramsey County and is sued in both his individual and official capacities.

Defendant Nicole Rueger, also known as Nikki, is a court clerk who obstructed Plaintiff's filings and is sued in both individual and official capacities.

Defendant Deputy Corina Loya is an officer with the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office and is sued in her individual capacity.

Defendant Ramsey County Sheriff's Office is sued as an institutional party responsible for procedural and administrative failures.

John and Jane Does 110 are unnamed court and sheriff personnel who participated in, contributed to, or failed to prevent the violations herein and will be identified through discovery.

IV. FACTUAL BACKGROUND

On August 12, 2024, Plaintiff placed an 11-minute call to Ramsey County Court and was transferred to Child Protective Services to report a public safety concern involving Respondent's child. This report was made in good faith and under Plaintiff's legal name, using her current phone number. The report included concerns based on social media content wherein the Respondent used her child as a lure in online love scams. Weeks later, Respondent filed for a Harassment Restraining Order. Plaintiff believes her identity as the reporting party was improperly disclosed by court or CPS personnel, resulting in legal retaliation. This incident establishes a potential breach of mandated reporter confidentiality and serves as the origin point for the coordinated misuse of process detailed in this complaint.

Between September and December 2024, Ramsey County held four separate hearings on the Harassment Restraining Order petition without notifying Plaintiff or establishing legal service. These included hearings on September 5, October 3, November 8, and December 12, 2024.

At each juncture, the court had already received documentation showing failed service attempts and returned mail. Nonetheless, the court advanced the proceedings without jurisdiction, culminating in the unlawful issuance of an HRO on December 12. These repeated violations of due process are central to Plaintiff's Fourteenth Amendment claim.

On December 12, 2024, Defendant Clysdale granted a Harassment Restraining Order (HRO) against Plaintiff Kellye Strickland without her knowledge or participation. The petitioner, Madeline Sally Lee, had submitted incorrect identifying information for Plaintiff, including an outdated address sourced from online public records dating back to Plaintiff's minor status and a phone number off by one digit. One of the addresses listed had previously been used in a cease and desist letter wherein Plaintiff had intentionally concealed her real location for safety.

Despite three documented service failures: (1) a deputy affidavit from New Hampshire dated August 29, 2024; (2) a second affidavit from Arizona dated October 2, 2024; and (3) a certified letter returned undelivered on November 12, 2024, the Ramsey County court proceeded with

a default hearing and granted the HRO.

These documents, submitted under oath by law enforcement agencies in two states, unambiguously confirm Plaintiff was never served prior to the hearing. (See Exhibit A)

On February 4, 2025, Deputy Corina Loya of the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office called Plaintiff. During the call, Loya failed to notify Plaintiff that a restraining order had already been granted. Loya requested Plaintiff's address, and Plaintiff, believing it was safe, provided her real location. Two weeks later, on February 26, 2025, Plaintiff was formally served at that address.

Shortly thereafter, Madeline Lee sent harassing mail directly to Plaintiff's residence, indicating that her address had been disclosed by someone within the Ramsey County system. Loya's own report noted substantial irregularities with the HRO: Plaintiff's date of birth was incorrect, the contact number was invalid, and the forms referenced revision dates from 2021 despite being issued in late 2024. Loya also documented that the order 'did not show up' in Ramsey County records and that Plaintiff was in emotional distress during the call. Loya explicitly stated that 'it's possible STRICKLAND is the victim.' (See Exhibit D)

Loya's report also claimed she had advised Plaintiff to contact the court. This was false. Plaintiff was not advised of any such action, and at no point was she informed of the order's existence until formal service was executed.

Following the February 4 call, Plaintiff initially believed that a new order may have been granted based on the content of that phone call. Still unclear, she again called Deputy Loya for clarification. Loya gave no meaningful explanation, instead telling Plaintiff to read the order and get a lawyer. During that call, Plaintiff read the documents for the first time and realized that the order had been issued two months prior, on December 12, 2024. This discovery marked the turning point in Plaintiff's understanding that due process had not only been violated but actively subverted.

Prior to that realization, Plaintiff had made multiple inquiries to Ramsey County and the Minnesota Attorney General's Office asking if any HRO had been filed against her. Each time, she was told no such record existed. One representative from the Attorney General's Office explicitly told her nothing was listed under her name. Plaintiff was completely unprepared when a deputy appeared in person to serve her with a live, court-issued HRO.

On March 7, 2025, ten days after formal service, Plaintiff filed a Motion to Rescind the HRO. The motion was timely under Minn. Stat. 609.748. Nevertheless, the court denied her motion on April 11, 2025, relying on the incorrect legal premise that the hearing date (December 12, 2024) should be used as the date of service. This directly violated procedural due process and applicable state law. (See Exhibit A)

Plaintiff then filed a Motion to Vacate on April 17, 2025, which was promptly granted a hearing. This action validated the lawfulness and timeliness of her March 7 motion and confirmed that the earlier denial was both procedurally and substantively erroneous.

Also on March 6, 2025, Plaintiff filed a civil small claims complaint against Madeline Lee for defamation and harassment. The filing was accepted, and the mandatory \$85 fee was paid. However, the case was never docketed, assigned, or scheduled. In contrast, Plaintiff's husband, Skanda Vishnu Sundar, filed an identical HRO petition on the same day. His case was docketed, granted ex parte, and scheduled for a hearing, without submitting a fee waiver. This disparity, involving near-identical filings from members of the same household, demonstrates procedural inequality and raises serious concerns of administrative bias. (See Exhibit B)

Throughout this period, Plaintiff was repeatedly dismissed and told to 'get a lawyer.' She received no assistance from Bridges to Safety. During intake, staff member Nikki mocked Plaintiff and denied services. When Plaintiff attempted to file complaints about the interaction, she was informed that Nikki did not work for Bridges. Plaintiff later discovered that Nikki

was likely Nicole Rueger, a court administrator directly involved in the handling of her case. Plaintiff contacted ADA support and engaged court staff, including Hannah Thurmes and Jill Ramaker. Despite disclosing that she is permanently disabled due to PTSD, Autism, and Bipolar Disorder, Plaintiff was denied any meaningful accommodation, alternative access, or even acknowledgment of her requests.

At every stage, Plaintiff made a good-faith effort to understand the process, comply with court rules, and avoid escalation. She did not begin asserting constitutional violations until it became evident that the court had willfully denied her a fair opportunity to defend herself, distorted procedural timelines, and deliberately failed to accommodate her disability.

On April 24, 2025, Plaintiff submitted a motion titled "Final_Motion_to_Docket_Strickland.pdf," following up on her previously accepted civil filing. That motion, too, was ignored. Meanwhile, her husband's case proceeded on schedule. (See Exhibit C)

This disparity between two nearly identical petitions filed on the same day by members of the same household underscores selective enforcement and systemic obstruction of justice.

*Witnesses and Third-Party Observations

Plaintiff intends to call the following material witnesses:

- Deputy Kaitlyn Burt (Merrimack County Sheriff's Department), who attempted service and filed a non-service affidavit.

- The Maricopa County Sheriff's Deputy who served Plaintiff on February 26, 2025, and who can attest to Plaintiff's confusion and the timeline of notice.

- Deputy Corina Loya (Ramsey County Sheriff's Office), who contacted Plaintiff by phone on February 4, 2025. Her report contains admissions of procedural irregularities and will be offered as evidence of both material fact and potential retaliation. She will be subpoenaed to testify as a fact witness to Plaintiff's state of mind, the service process timeline, and the communications that followed.

- Neil Fredericks (Records Technician, Ramsey County Sheriff's Office)
Responsible for compiling and releasing the February 4, 2025 police report authored by Deputy Loya. May be questioned regarding the report's timing, contents, factual contradictions, and potential omissions. Will be called to authenticate document custody and confirm how Plaintiff's statements were processed internally.

- Deputy John Gleason (Assisting Officer, Ramsey County Sheriff's Office)
Listed as the assisting officer on the February 4, 2025 harassment report. May be called to testify about his involvement in reviewing, supporting, or co-signing the report's findings. Can be questioned regarding the Sheriff's Office's internal knowledge of HRO discrepancies and Plaintiff's distress during the call.

- Donnell Marie Lee (Mother of Respondent Madeline Lee)
May be called to testify regarding prior incidents involving Respondent's conduct and communications, including a prior event where she clarified that threats received were not from Plaintiff. Her testimony is relevant to refuting false accusations and establishing Respondent's pattern of misrepresentation to law enforcement.

- Sumit Sinha (Individual named by Respondent as source of threats)
Named by Madeline Lee as the person responsible for sending threatening letters and texts to Plaintiff. If located or subpoenaed, may confirm or deny involvement. If unavailable, his name and connection to Madeline raise questions about her credibility and potential third-party coordination or fabrication of evidence.

These witnesses will corroborate Plaintiff's claim that service did not occur prior to the hearing and that she had no meaningful opportunity to contest the HRO.

*Institutional Pattern and Practice

While it is possible that one court official initially acted in error, the resulting harm was enabled and perpetuated by an entire administrative structure. Ramsey County regularly issues HROs for a \$300 filing fee, often without verifying valid service or factual basis. Plaintiff's experience reflects not a single failure but a chain of normalized procedural disregard, one that systematically undermines due process for pro se and disabled litigants.

V. INJURY AND HARM

Plaintiff is permanently and totally disabled due to severe PTSD and Bipolar Disorder. She has received Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits for nearly two decades. These diagnoses were openly disclosed in prior communications, including a cease-and-desist letter sent to the petitioner and in formal records provided to Ramsey County staff.

As a result of the actions described above, Plaintiff experienced a profound collapse in her ability to function within or trust the legal system. She made repeated good-faith efforts to seek information, support, and clarity: calling Ramsey County court staff, Bridges to Safety, and even contacting the Minnesota Attorney General's Office. These efforts were met with cold deflection, misinformation, or no response at all.

The stress caused by the unconstitutional issuance and maintenance of the HRO had physical consequences: Plaintiff lost over 20 pounds, began losing her hair, suffered ongoing insomnia, and experienced near-constant panic attacks. These harms did not result from the original allegations, but from the state's refusal to acknowledge its own error, the prolonged concealment of material facts, and the continued procedural shutdown of her access to remedy.

Plaintiff is not motivated by vengeance, but by the desire for repair and justice. She seeks recognition that what was done to her was not merely negligent, it was unconstitutional. What she endured was not a personal dispute, but the weaponization of government process against a disabled litigant. These harms are not theoretical; they are civic, bodily, and deeply institutional.

While Plaintiff acknowledges that reputational harm and emotional distress are also being litigated in a related civil matter against Meta Platforms, Inc., the damages sought here arise directly from Ramsey County's systemic obstruction of her constitutional rights, its failure to provide accommodations, and its refusal to correct unlawful court actions even after admitting them.

VI. CLAIMS FOR RELIEF

Count I Violation of Procedural Due Process
(14th Amendment, 42 U.S.C. Section 1983)

Defendants deprived Plaintiff of her constitutionally protected right to notice and a meaningful opportunity to be heard before the issuance of a Harassment Restraining Order. The court proceeded with a default ruling despite documented non-service, including affidavits from law enforcement officers and a returned certified letter. The denial of Plaintiff's timely Motion to Rescind further compounded the violation, applying an incorrect service date and closing the door to her procedural rights.

Count II Denial of Access to the Courts
(1st and 14th Amendments)

Plaintiff attempted, in good faith, to file a civil complaint and pursue redress through lawful channels. Her March 6, 2025 small claims filing was accepted, paid for, and then ignored, never docketed, assigned, or scheduled. Repeated follow-up filings were similarly disregarded. Court staff denied her procedural access while granting parallel relief to another

similarly situated party. These acts constituted a deliberate denial of Plaintiff's First and Fourteenth Amendment rights.

Count III Color of Law Misconduct
(42 U.S.C. Section 1983)

The actions taken by Defendants, including the issuance of an HRO without valid service, the use of knowingly false procedural timelines to deny Plaintiff relief, and the concealment of institutional failures, were conducted under color of state law and in violation of federally protected rights. Defendants acted with knowledge of material discrepancies and failed to correct errors, constituting a misuse of governmental authority for harmful or retaliatory purposes.

Count IV ADA Title II Violation
(42 U.S.C. Section 12132)

Plaintiff is a qualified individual with disabilities as defined under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Despite multiple disclosures of her conditions, PTSD, Autism, and Bipolar Disorder, Plaintiff was not provided with reasonable accommodations by the court, staff, or affiliated agencies. She was denied accessible communication, alternative filing assistance, and equitable engagement with court procedures. These failures constitute systemic noncompliance with ADA Title II obligations by public entities.

Count V Violation of Equal Protection
(14th Amendment, 42 U.S.C. Section 1983)

Plaintiff was treated differently from similarly situated individuals, including her own spouse, despite presenting near-identical filings and seeking the same relief. Plaintiff's civil filings were ignored or obstructed, while her husband's were processed and granted on the same day. This disparate treatment, in the context of Plaintiff's known disability and pro se status, constitutes a violation of her right to equal protection under the law.

Count VI Retaliation and Interference with ADA Rights
(42 U.S.C. Section 12203)

After Plaintiff disclosed her disability and requested accommodation, she was subject to further denial of services, dismissive treatment, and public hostility by court-affiliated staff. This includes mocking by Nikki, later identified as Nicole Rueger. Such conduct interferes with Plaintiff's protected rights under the ADA and constitutes retaliation for attempting to assert those rights.

Count VII Violation of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
(Section 504, 29 U.S.C. Section 794)

Defendants are recipients of federal financial assistance and failed to ensure that Plaintiff, a qualified individual with disabilities, had equal access to the court system. Defendants did not provide accommodations or procedural access consistent with federal mandates, nor did they address known barriers after repeated notifications. These failures amount to unlawful discrimination in violation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

VII. PRAYER FOR RELIEF

Plaintiff respectfully requests that this Court:

Declare that the actions of Defendants—individually and institutionally—violated Plaintiff's constitutional and statutory rights under the Fourteenth Amendment, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act;

Enter an injunction compelling Ramsey County to:

Vacate the December 12, 2024 Harassment Restraining Order entered without valid service or jurisdiction;

Properly docket and schedule Plaintiff's civil filings currently stalled or ignored;

Prohibit further administrative obstruction or retaliation against Plaintiff;

Award compensatory damages in excess of \$100,000 for emotional distress, reputational injury, denial of access to justice;

Award punitive damages against the individual Defendants—including but not limited to Nicole Rueger and Deputy County Clerk—

Award reasonable attorney's fees and costs pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1988, should counsel be retained;

Grant such other relief as this Court deems just and proper, including leave to amend this Complaint as additional facts develop.

Note for the record that Plaintiff will submit an accompanying:

Motion for Preliminary Injunction;

Exhibit List and evidentiary supplements;

Proposed Scheduling Order.

VIII. JURY DEMAND

Plaintiff demands a trial by jury on all triable issues.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated:

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