

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF CONNECTICUT**

Woodrow Vereen,
Plaintiff

v.

No. 16-cv-599

Keith Ruffin and Carlos Vasquez,
Defendants

Complaint

1. This is an action to vindicate a motorist's privacy rights against an unlawful pat-frisk in the absence of suspicion that he was armed, and against a search conducted contrary to his wishes and without probable cause.

Jurisdiction and Venue

2. The United States District Court has jurisdiction over the dispute by authority of 28 U.S.C. § 1331, as the plaintiff's claims arise under the United States Constitution.
3. Venue lies in this judicial district in accordance with 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b)(2) because all of the events giving rise to the plaintiff's claims occurred in the District of Connecticut.

Parties

4. Plaintiff Woodrow Vereen is a resident of Bridgeport, Connecticut. Mr. Vereen is a music minister at two churches in Bridgeport, and is employed as a juvenile detention officer by the Connecticut judiciary. He has no criminal history, and, at all relevant times, his driver's license is and was valid.

5. Defendant Keith Ruffin is and was, at all times relevant to this suit, a police officer employed by the city government of Bridgeport, Connecticut and a “person” for purposes of 42 U.S.C. § 1983.
6. Defendant Carlos Vasquez is and was, at all times relevant to this suit, a police officer employed by the city government of Bridgeport, Connecticut and a “person” for purposes of 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

Facts

7. On May 30, 2015 at approximately 7:15 PM, Mr. Vereen was driving on Fairfield Avenue in Bridgeport, Connecticut. It was a clear day, and the sun was up.
8. Mr. Vereen was driving his spouse’s Hyundai Sonata, which was lawfully registered and insured.
9. Mr. Vereen had no weapons or contraband on his person or in the car.
10. Mr. Vereen’s two sons, aged seven and three, were in the back seat. The Vereens were driving to get ice cream after the older boy’s little league game.
11. At the intersection of Fairfield Avenue and Albion Street, the defendants, who were each in a marked police cruiser, followed Mr. Vereen and turned on the flashing lights of their police cruisers.
12. Mr. Vereen obeyed the flashing lights and pulled his car over to the side of the road.
13. Defendant Ruffin approached Mr. Vereen’s window and told Mr. Vereen that he should have stopped at a yellow light that Ruffin claimed Vereen drove through on Fairfield Avenue.
14. Defendant Ruffin told Mr. Vereen that there was a “new Connecticut law”

requiring drivers to stop at yellow lights.

15. Defendant Ruffin asked for Mr. Vereen's driver's license, registration, and proof of insurance. Mr. Vereen produced all of the items except for proof of insurance, because the insurance certificate in his spouse's car had expired a few days prior and his spouse had forgotten to put the new certificate in the car.
16. After verifying Mr. Vereen's driver's license and registration in his police cruiser, Defendant Ruffin asked Mr. Vereen if he could search the car.
17. Mr. Vereen declined.
18. Defendant Ruffin did not see any weapons or contraband on Mr. Vereen or in the car.
19. Nonetheless, Defendant Ruffin ordered Mr. Vereen out of his car, and ordered him to put his hands on the trunk of the car with his legs apart.
20. Mr. Vereen complied.
21. In full view of the boys in the back seat and the passersby on the sidewalk, Ruffin pat-frisked Mr. Vereen and ordered him to stand near Defendant Vasquez, who had been standing behind the car.
22. Mr. Vereen complied.
23. At all times, Mr. Vereen was respectful and well-behaved, and did not need to be subdued by either defendant, or to be handcuffed. Neither defendant ordered Mr. Vereen to sit on the curb during the events giving rise to this suit.
24. Defendant Ruffin walked to the driver's door of Mr. Vereen's car, opened it, and began searching the front of the passenger compartment.
25. As Defendant Ruffin began searching Mr. Vereen's car, Mr. Vereen told Defendant Vasquez that he had not given permission to search his car.

26. Defendant Vasquez told Mr. Vereen to “be cool,” and threatened that, because he lacked proof of insurance, the defendants could tow Mr. Vereen’s car if they wanted to.
27. After searching the driver’s side front of the passenger compartment, Defendant Ruffin moved to the passenger’s side. Using a flashlight, he searched the passenger’s seat area, including the center console and glove compartment.
28. From the front seat, Defendant Ruffin also searched the rear passenger compartment without so much as saying hello to Mr. Vereen’s frightened children.
29. Defendant Ruffin’s search turned up no weapons or contraband.
30. Defendant Vasquez ordered Mr. Vereen to return to the driver’s seat of the car, and Mr. Vereen complied.
31. Defendant Ruffin presented Mr. Vereen with a \$246 traffic citation, for allegedly failing to stop at a red light and failing to carry proof of insurance.
32. Both charges were dismissed by the Connecticut Superior Court in November 2015.

Count 1: Defendant Ruffin’s Illegal Exit Order and Frisk of Mr. Vereen

33. By removing Mr. Vereen from his car and frisking him without reasonable articulable suspicion that Mr. Vereen had committed a crime or possessed a dangerous weapon, Defendant Ruffin contravened the Fourth Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Count 2: Defendant Ruffin's Illegal Search of Mr. Vereen's Car

34. By searching Mr. Vereen's car without permission or probable cause to believe that Mr. Vereen had committed a crime, Defendant Ruffin contravened the Fourth Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Count 3: Defendant Vasquez's Failure to Intervene in the Illegal Exit Order and Frisk

35. By failing to intervene on Mr. Vereen's behalf and stop Defendant Ruffin from illegally ordering Mr. Vereen out of his car and frisking him, Defendant Vasquez violated the Fourth Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Count 4: Defendant Vasquez's Failure to Intervene in the Illegal Search

36. By failing to intervene on Mr. Vereen's behalf and stop Defendant Ruffin from illegally searching the car, Defendant Vasquez violated the Fourth Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Request for Relief

37. Therefore, Mr. Vereen is entitled to have this Court:

- (a) enter judgment in his favor on all counts;
- (b) award him damages;
- (c) award him punitive damages;

(d) order the defendants to reimburse his reasonable costs and attorneys' fees in conformance with 42 U.S.C. § 1988; and

(e) order any other relief that it sees fit.

/s/ Dan Barrett
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April 11, 2016