July 2017 Bar Examination

ESSAY I

On January 15, 2014, Plaintiff, a resident of Miller County, was driving southbound on a two-lane state highway in Baker County, Georgia, approaching the crest of a small hill. Defendant was driving northbound on the same highway and was approaching Plaintiff from the other side of the hill. As Defendant neared the crest of the hill, a Department of Transportation (D.O.T.) employee who was cutting grass on the shoulder of the state highway suddenly pulled his tractor and "bushhog" partially onto the northbound lane and then back onto the shoulder, causing Defendant to swerve into the southbound lane and into the path of Plaintiff. A violent collision occurred, severely injuring both Plaintiff and Defendant. As a result of his injuries, Plaintiff suffered extensive and permanent brain impairment which rendered him legally incompetent and ultimately led to the appointment of a guardian/conservator on June 1, 2014. Defendant died on March 15, 2014, as a result of his injuries, and his will was admitted to probate in the Probate Court of Early County, Georgia on April 30, 2014, by his son who was a resident of Dougherty County, Georgia. Defendant's son was named under his father's will as Executor.

On February 1, 2015, Plaintiff's guardian/conservator engaged an attorney to institute litigation for all claims arising from the collision against Defendant's estate, the D.O.T., and the D.O.T. employee who was a resident of Baker County, Georgia. The attorney immediately prepared an ante litem notice and served it by certified mail on the Commissioner of the Department of Transportation in Atlanta four days later.

Questions:

1. Please discuss whether, under Georgia law, the ante litem notice was timely filed and correctly served.

2. Please discuss what information must be contained in a proper ante litem notice under Georgia law.

3. Please state the date on which the statute of limitations would expire as to each potential defendant and explain as to each potential defendant why it would be that date.

4. Please discuss the venue options that are available to Plaintiff's attorney, if:

(a) He names the State of Georgia/D.O.T. as a defendant; or

(b) He sues only Defendant's estate.

ESSAY II

All Night restaurant, a client of your firm, purchased a vacant parcel of land in Smyrna, Georgia in 1979. All Night developed the site and constructed a restaurant that opened for business in 1981.

Although the title report and survey of All Night's property clearly identified the property lines, during construction of the restaurant, All Night's parking lot curb was built 1.5 feet over the property line on the adjacent property owned by National Bank. Additionally, a private drainage inlet was constructed 5 feet over the property line onto National Bank's property. The curb and the drainage inlet are located within National Bank's landscaping curb, are used solely by All Night, and are visible to all.

National Bank closed its Smyrna branch in 2015 and sold its property to Trendy Gym in 2016. Trendy Gym plans to remodel the building and open for business as a gym in 2017.

Trendy Gym got a title report and survey of the property before closing on the purchase of the property in 2016. The survey clearly showed the location of the curb and the drainage inlet encroachments onto the property. The title report does not show a recorded easement for either the curb or the drainage inlet encroachments.

After closing, Trendy Gym's broker contacted All Night and asked the restaurant to either (i) remove the encroachments from the property sold to Trendy Gym, or (ii) pay $1,500 per year to Trendy Gym to lease the encroachment areas. The broker stated that the encroachments do not interfere with Trendy Gym's planned remodel or its business operations on the property.

All Night has no construction records or other files indicating that All Night had permission to construct the parking lot curb or drainage inlet on the National Bank (now Trendy Gym) property. However, All Night believes that it has a defendable interest in the property on which the parking lot curb and drainage inlet are built, even though this area was not within the original boundaries of the All Night property when it developed the site and constructed its restaurant. Your partner recalls that possession for a certain period of time may be relevant in this instance and has asked you to prepare a research memorandum addressing this issue and setting forth the basis on which All Night may be able to assert an interest in this encroachment area property.

Specifically, you are asked to address the following in your memorandum:

Questions:

1. On what basis can All Night claim an interest in the property upon which the parking lot curb and drainage inlet are built and what property interest would that be, if any? Please explain your answer.

2. Can Trendy Gym require that All Night remove its curbing and drainage inlet from the Trendy Gym property or can Trendy Gym require All Night to pay for the use of the encroachment area? Why or why not? Please explain your answer.

3. How would it change your research memorandum if All Night had located records from 1980 indicating that All Night had permission from National Bank to construct the parking lot curb and drainage inlet on the National Bank Property? Explain your answer.

ESSAY III

Helen worked as a paralegal for Big Law Firm during her three years of law school. When she graduated, Big Law Firm promoted her to the position of law clerk and expanded her responsibilities. Once she was sworn in to the State Bar of Georgia, she became an associate attorney. As an associate, she was assigned to work with one of the twenty-five partners. She was not authorized to communicate directly with clients without express prior approval from the partner.

After one year as an associate, Helen decided to open her own law practice. Before leaving Big Law Firm and opening her own practice, Helen went to Big Law Firm's office after hours and copied Big Law Firm's list of clients, engagement letters, fee agreements, and other forms that Big Law Firm had developed. Helen then rented an office, agreeing to share office space with Lori, who was beginning her own bankruptcy practice. Helen named her firm "South Georgia Law" which was the only way the law firm was identified on Helen's business cards, her letterhead, and above the door to her office.

On the day she resigned from Big Law Firm, Helen sent a letter to all of Big Law Firm's clients announcing her move and identifying herself as the attorney who managed their files at Big Law Firm. Helen told the clients in her letter that she was familiar with their files and had worked on their matters for the past four years. She offered continuity of representation if the clients would fire Big Law Firm and hire South Georgia Law. If the clients made the change from Big Law Firm to South Georgia Law within thirty days, Helen also offered the clients "no fee unless you win or collect".

Helen's letter also announced that representation in Bankruptcy Court was available. Helen planned to refer all bankruptcy cases to Lori for a referral fee and did not intend to handle any bankruptcy work herself. Lori has agreed to handle Helen's bankruptcy cases.

Two weeks after opening the doors of South Georgia Law, Helen purposely threw away all of the copies of the letters she had sent to the clients.

Questions:

1. Which of the Georgia Rules of Professional Conduct, if any, might Helen have violated? Explain your answer fully. You do not need to cite the Rule number in your answer.

2. Which of the Georgia Rules of Professional Conduct, if any, might Lori have violated? Explain your answer fully. You do not need to cite the Rule number in your answer.

ESSAY IV

In the work room behind his garage, Frank Farmer created a software program to improve the productivity of farmers. Frank's software program became so successful he decided to incorporate under the name FarmTech, Inc. ("FarmTech"), as sole shareholder and president. After a few years of operation, Frank's revenues exceeded $5 million per year, and he decided he wanted to sell FarmTech and retire.

Aaron Agriculture learned that Frank wanted to retire and determined that buying FarmTech would be a win-win for them both. Believing FarmTech could be worth as much as $10 million in value to his businesses, Aaron approached Frank with a tender offer to purchase FarmTech for $7.5 million in cash. Aaron and Frank entered into a letter of intent on January 15, 2017, with the stated purpose of developing a final, written contract for the purchase and sale of FarmTech on or before March 15, 2017. The letter of intent provided that neither Aaron nor Frank would be bound unless a written agreement was entered into prior to the March 15, 2017 deadline.

By March 1, Aaron and Frank still had not finalized a written agreement, and Aaron became concerned Frank was going to back out of the sale. Aaron approached Frank about extending the deadline to finalize the written purchase and sale agreement to April 15, 2017, but Frank did not think it was necessary. He assured Aaron he had every intention of selling FarmTech to him for $7.5 million and stated, "we have a deal, you have my word." Aaron believed him and began arranging financing for the purchase of FarmTech. Aaron also entered into a contract with a business consultant to advise him regarding the best way to merge FarmTech into his businesses after the sale. Around the same time, Frank sent a memorandum to his employees informing them that the purchase of FarmTech was imminent and their jobs would be secure for the foreseeable future.

Then, Betty Busybody, an agent for Bigger Business Brokers, approached Frank and informed him that selling FarmTech to Aaron for $7.5 million was a bad idea. Busybody promised Frank she could get him a better price for FarmTech if he terminated further discussions with Aaron. Frank liked what he heard, and on April 1, 2017, after the expiration of the period set forth in the original letter of intent for the execution of a written contract, Frank told Aaron he was no longer willing to sell FarmTech to him.

Aaron insisted they had a binding agreement and promised to take legal action if Frank did not go through with the sale of FarmTech.

For Frank's part, because he and Aaron never signed a written agreement, he did not believe there was a legally binding agreement between him and Aaron under Georgia law, and he refused to sell FarmTech to Aaron.

Questions:

1. Based upon these facts, does Aaron have a legally binding contract under Georgia law to purchase FarmTech from Frank, even though the final terms and conditions were never reduced to writing as contemplated in the letter of intent? Please explain your answer.

2. Assuming a court having jurisdiction over the parties rules there was a binding purchase and sale contract between Aaron and Frank, what remedy or remedies are available to Aaron?

(a) Can Aaron ask the court to force Frank to specifically perform an oral agreement and sell FarmTech to him for $7.5 million cash?

(b) If Aaron seeks money damages for Frank's refusal to sell FarmTech, what amount should he ask for and why?

Please explain your answers.

3. Does Aaron have a claim against Betty Busybody for encouraging Frank not to go through with the sale of FarmTech to Aaron? Please explain your answer.

Applicant Number

MPT-1
717

THE MPT®

MULTISTATE PERFORMANCE TEST

Peek et al. v. Doris Stern and Allied Behavioral Health Services

Read the directions on the back cover.
Do not break the seal until you are told to do so.

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Peek et al. v. Doris Stern and Allied Behavioral Health Services

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ROBINSON & HOUSE LLC
Attorneys at Law
44 Court Drive
Fairview Heights, Franklin 33705

MEMORANDUM

TO: Examinee
FROM: Jean Robinson
DATE: July 25, 2017
RE: Peek et al. v. Doris Stern and Allied Behavioral Health Services

We represent a class of Union County women probationers in a lawsuit filed in federal court under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 of the Civil Rights Act. All probationers convicted of misdemeanors in Union County receive probation services through Allied Behavioral Health Services. Our complaint alleges that the defendants Allied and Doris Stern, in her capacity as executive director of Allied, are discriminating against women probationers based on gender.

The named plaintiff in our class action, Rita Peek, was sentenced to 18 months' probation by the Union County court in May 2016. (See attached sentencing order.) A condition of her probation was that she receive mental health counseling. To date, Peek has met all the requirements of her probation except for mental health counseling because Allied has failed to provide that counseling.

We filed suit in the U.S. District Court for the District of Franklin against Allied and Doris Stern alleging that they have developed a plan of services that disproportionately denies probation services to female probationers. Thus far, we have deposed Allied's Probation Services Unit director. During a recent case-management conference, the U.S. District Court judge raised the issue of whether the defendants are state actors and, therefore, subject to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The judge ordered the parties to file simultaneous briefs on that issue alone.

Please prepare the argument section of our brief in support of our position that Stern and Allied are acting under color of state law and are subject to suit under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, relying on all available tests employed by the courts to determine whether parties are state actors. Follow our office guidelines in drafting your argument. Because the court ordered simultaneous briefs, you should anticipate the defendants' arguments and respond to them. Do not draft a separate statement of facts, but incorporate all relevant facts into your argument.

ROBINSON & HOUSE LLC

OFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: All lawyers
FROM: Litigation supervisor
DATE: April 14, 2011
RE: Simultaneously filed persuasive briefs

All simultaneously filed persuasive briefs shall conform to the following guidelines:

Statement of the Case [omitted]

Statement of Facts [omitted]

Body of the Argument

The body of each argument should analyze applicable legal authority and persuasively argue how both the facts and the law support our client's position. Be sure to cite both the law and the evidence. Emphasize supporting authority but address contrary authority as well; explain or distinguish contrary authority in the argument. Because the court ordered simultaneous briefing, anticipate the other party's arguments and respond to them; do not reserve arguments for reply or supplemental briefing. Be mindful that courts are not persuaded by exaggerated, unsupported arguments.

Organize the argument into its major components. Present all the arguments for each component separately.

With regard to each separate component, write carefully crafted subject headings that illustrate the arguments they address. The argument headings should succinctly summarize the reasons the tribunal should take the position you are advocating. A heading should be a specific application of a rule of law to the facts of the case and not a bare legal or factual conclusion or a statement of an abstract principle. For example: Improper: Plaintiff has satisfied the exhaustion of administrative remedies requirement. Proper: Where Plaintiff requested an administrative hearing by timely completing Form 3B, but the prison has refused to schedule a hearing, Plaintiff has satisfied the exhaustion of remedies requirement.

STATE OF FRANKLIN
UNION COUNTY DISTRICT COURT

State of Franklin	)	
	)	
v.	)	**Case No. 2016-3098**
	)	
Rita Peek, Defendant	)	

SENTENCING ORDER

Rita Peek, the above-named Defendant, having been found guilty of misdemeanor battery, a violation of § 35-87 of the Franklin Criminal Code, is hereby sentenced to 10 months in jail, but that jail sentence is stayed on the condition that the Defendant successfully complete a probation term of 18 months beginning on this date and subject to the conditions listed below.

During the term of probation, the Defendant must successfully satisfy the following conditions:

1. Immediately report to the Union County Probation Officer to register as a probationer, and follow any rules or regulations established by the County Probation Officer.
2. When ordered by the County Probation Officer, report to Allied Behavioral Health Services, 806 W. Main St., Fairview Heights, Franklin, for those services ordered by this Court and any services ordered by the County Probation Officer.
3. Meet monthly with a counselor assigned by Allied Behavioral Health Services to review compliance with this Order; Allied Behavioral Health Services to inform Court of any violations of this Order.
4. Be evaluated for and undergo mental health counseling by Allied Behavioral Health Services.
5. Not consume any drugs or alcohol and submit samples of blood, urine, or both for tests to determine the presence of any prohibited substances.
6. Not violate any criminal statute of any jurisdiction.
7. Not leave the State of Franklin without the consent of this Court.
8. Pay to Allied Behavioral Health Services a fee of $50 per month.

In the event that the Defendant fails to satisfy these conditions during the probationary term, probation may be revoked and the Defendant be subject to one or more of the following: (1) reinstatement of the original 10-month jail sentence, (2) extension of probation for a term of up

to three years on any conditions the Court deems appropriate, or (3) other relief that the Court deems just and proper.

Entered: May 31, 2016.

Honorable James Finch
Union County District Court

ROBINSON & HOUSE LLC

MEMORANDUM TO FILE

FROM: Jean Robinson
DATE: June 4, 2017
RE: Peek et al. v. Doris Stern and Allied Behavioral Health Services

Ever since 2014, when Union County began contracting with Allied Behavioral Health Services to provide misdemeanor probation services in the County, Allied has in effect given male probationers priority in receiving mental health counseling. As a result, Allied typically fails to provide female probationers with counseling. It is typical that when a woman's probation term ends without her completing counseling, Allied informs the sentencing court of the failure to complete counseling. The court then usually extends the term of probation, although the court does have the power to revoke probation and impose the original jail sentence.

Rita Peek, our named plaintiff, has experienced such a delay in undergoing counseling. She was sentenced to 18 months' probation on May 31, 2016, and ordered to undergo mental health counseling. Allied has failed to initiate that counseling. Peek is now over a year into her 18-month probation term. If Allied does not provide counseling services very soon, Peek will face an extension of her probation (with additional costs assessed to her). The sentencing court also has the power to reinstate her 10-month jail sentence if she does not complete the counseling within the probationary period.

Peek's criminal defense attorney filed a motion with the Union County court in March of this year, asking it to order Allied to immediately offer counseling to Peek. The court denied that motion. Peek's criminal defense attorney then contacted us.

In April, we filed a class action lawsuit (the class has been certified) in federal court alleging that Allied and Doris Stern, in her capacity as executive director of Allied, have violated female probationers' civil rights by disproportionately denying services to women, in violation of 42 U.S.C. § 1983, which entitles them to a civil remedy for the deprivation of their constitutional rights.

Later this month we are scheduled to depose James Simmons, the director of Allied's Probation Services Unit.

Excerpts from Deposition of James Simmons
June 26, 2017

Examination by Plaintiff's Attorney Jean Robinson

Q: Please state your name and position.

A: James Simmons, director of the Probation Services Unit of Allied Behavioral Health Services.

Q: Explain the organization of Allied Behavioral Health Services.

A: Allied is a nonprofit organization formed in 1975 to provide mental health counseling and other services to residents of Union and neighboring counties. We have a board of directors that hires the executive director, who is currently Doris Stern. The board determines what services we offer, approves our entering into contracts, and sets policies, including personnel policies. Each year, Ms. Stern presents a plan detailing our program goals and means of accomplishing those goals, and the board approves it. Allied is a private entity, like any nonprofit.

Q: Who is on the board of directors of Allied Behavioral Health Services?

A: We have 11 board members. One of the county judges and the county director of public health services became members when we started offering probation services and expanded the board. Before that we had just nine board members, and those nine have always included community and business leaders, religious leaders, and active citizens.

Q: What influence do the two public officials have over the board?

A: They are simply 2 of 11 board members. The board requires a majority vote to act.

Q: How is Allied organized regarding the services it provides?

A: We have two units—the Family Services Unit and the Probation Services Unit, which I direct.

Q: To whom do you report?

A: To Doris Stern and through her to Allied's board of directors.

Q: Who pays you?

A: Allied.

Q: Who evaluates you?

A: Ms. Stern.

Q: Who evaluates the counselors who provide probation services?

A: I do, and Ms. Stern reviews those evaluations.

Q: Explain the relationship between Allied and Union County's Probation Office.

A: In 2013, the State of Franklin decided that counties could contract with private entities for probation services for those defendants convicted of misdemeanors. A year later, the Union County Probation Office asked us to contract with them for probation services. Most of what Union County wanted for those on probation for misdemeanors were counseling-related services that we already provided. So we prepared all the documents the county wanted and began providing probation services. The Probation Services Unit is the part of our agency that I direct. We carry out sentencing orders of the court. How we do so is up to us, as long as we follow court orders. We submit an annual plan and quarterly and annual reports to the county. Day to day, we do not deal with the county.

Q: How is Allied funded?

A: We are funded from several sources. The county pays for most of the probation services, with the probationers' fees making up the rest. And we get grants and funds from the community—fund-raisers, corporate donors, that sort of thing. Much of the funding for our counseling for persons not on probation comes from insurance; some comes from individual clients who pay for their own services. Altogether, Allied gets 40% of its funding from public sources and 60% from private sources.

Q: I need to clarify. Consider only the funding for the Union County probation program. How much of that is funded by a combination of funds from the county itself and fees paid by the probationers?

A: One hundred percent.

Q: Union County is a unit of local government, subject to the laws of Franklin, isn't that correct?

A: I am not a lawyer, but I believe that is correct.

Q: When operating probation services for the county, Allied must meet the requirements set by state law, isn't that true?

A: Yes.

Q: State law sets out minimum qualifications for the employees of entities like Allied which provide probation services, correct?

A: Yes.

Q: Isn't it true that Allied must set out an annual plan for providing probation services and have it approved by the County Probation Officer?

A: Yes.

Q: Each probationer served by Allied has been convicted of a misdemeanor crime in a Union County District Court in the State of Franklin, isn't that right?

A: Yes, each probationer served by us has been referred to us by the courts, but our other departments offer services that are not court-referred.

Q: Isn't it true that in each case when a person is convicted of a misdemeanor and placed on probation, the judge determines the conditions of probation?

A: Yes.

Q: Allied cannot deviate from those conditions, can it—that is, you cannot add or remove conditions?

A: We carry out whatever the judge orders.

Q: Who determines what kind of counseling services you provide to probationers?

A: Again, the sentencing court. We typically evaluate probationers to determine the extent of mental health counseling needed and decide when and how they receive those services.

Q: Are you familiar with my client, Rita Peek, the named plaintiff in this case?

A: Yes, ma'am. She is a Union County probationer and under our supervision.

Q: Isn't it true that the court ordered that Ms. Peek receive mental health counseling?

A: Yes. Among other things, the court ordered mental health counseling for her. We evaluated her during her second meeting with us, back in June 2016. The result was that she needed what we call "Level Two Counseling"—both group and individual therapy sessions. We put her on our list for mental health counseling.

Q: Have you provided such counseling to her?

A: Not yet.

Q: Ms. Peek is still on a waiting list for that counseling, 13 months after she was sentenced to probation, correct?

A: Correct.

[Testimony regarding Allied's approach to providing counseling to women probationers is omitted.]

***

Q: Each quarter you report to the County Probation Officer on those probationers being served and what services were provided, correct?

A: Yes.

Q: As part of that report, the counseling waiting list is reported to, and approved by, the County Probation Officer each calendar quarter, correct?

A: Correct.

Q: During the last three quarters, at least, you have included Ms. Peek on the waiting list as needing mental health counseling and not yet served, correct?

A: I don't have the reports in front of me, but that is probably true.

Q: And the County Probation Officer has approved those quarterly reports, right?

A: Yes.

Q: I refer you to the reports Allied filed with the County Probation Officer. These show that 90% of the female probationers you serve do not even start, let alone complete, counseling within the probation term, isn't that correct?

A: If that is what the reports say, it must be true.

Q: In fact, 70% of the female probationers are given an extension of their probation term in order to complete counseling, isn't that true?

A: I believe that is true.

Q: These same reports show that, by contrast, 75% of male probationers receive and complete counseling within the period of their probation, isn't that correct?

A: If that is what the report says, then that is correct.

Q: In addition to providing mental health counseling to Ms. Peek, Allied is supposed to oversee her as a probationer, isn't that true?

A: Yes.

Q: Overseeing her means, among other things, ensuring that she reports to Allied monthly and complies with any required drug and alcohol testing, right?

A: Yes.

Q: Has Ms. Peek met all the conditions of probation imposed on her, other than receiving mental health counseling?

A: Yes, she has been a model probationer.

Q: If a probationer were to violate a condition of probation, you would report that to the court, wouldn't you?

A: Yes.

Q: If a probationer, such as Ms. Peek, failed to complete the conditions of probation, her probation could be revoked and she could be sent to jail, correct?

A: Yes.

Q: Or her probation could be extended, correct?

A: Yes.

Q: Probation is a restriction on a person's liberty, isn't it?

A: Yes.

Q: In that regard, being on probation is a restriction sort of like being in jail?

A: Well, it's a lot better than being in jail, but it is a restriction. Probationers have to comply with conditions of probation, they must meet with us in person each month, they cannot leave the state, and so on.

Q: And isn't it true that only the State of Franklin has the power to sentence someone to probation, set conditions of probation, revoke probation, and send someone to jail?

A: I am not a lawyer, but I believe that is so.

Robinson: No further questions.

EXCERPTS FROM FRANKLIN CRIMINAL CODE

§ 35-210 Misdemeanor Sentencing; Probation

For a person convicted of a misdemeanor, the court may impose a jail sentence not to exceed 12 months. The court may suspend the jail sentence and place the person on probation for a term not to exceed three years. When placing a person on probation, the court shall determine the conditions of probation.

§ 35-211 Probation Services

(a) Each county shall appoint a County Probation Officer who shall be an employee of the county and shall provide probation services to the county as required by the Criminal Code, either directly or through other entities as provided by law.

(b) Any county may elect to provide probation services for those convicted of misdemeanors by contracting with a private entity, provided that the private entity:

1. Shall be a nonprofit entity.
2. Shall receive approval from the County Probation Officer of an annual Plan of Services which must include
   (i) oversight of those on probation;
   (ii) monthly meetings with those on probation unless otherwise ordered;
   (iii) drug and alcohol testing; and
   (iv) drug and alcohol counseling, anger management counseling, vocational and mental health counseling, and referral to educational programs.
3. Shall require that each individual providing such services possess at least a bachelor's degree in the relevant professional field or its equivalent as determined by the County Probation Officer.
4. Shall submit to the County Probation Officer quarterly reports listing the names of probationers served during that quarter, the services provided to those probationers, and any other information required by the County Probation Officer, and shall receive approval of those reports from the County Probation Officer.
5. Shall submit to the County Probation Office an annual report of services provided and all expenses incurred and receive approval of that report from the County.

Lake v. Mega Lottery Group
United States Court of Appeals (15th Cir. 2009)

Olivia Lake sued the Mega Lottery Group pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, claiming that it fired her without due process. Mega moved to dismiss the complaint, arguing that as a private actor, it cannot be sued under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The district court dismissed the complaint. Lake appealed. The sole issue on appeal is whether Mega acted as a state actor when it fired Lake. We affirm.

42 U.S.C. § 1983 provides for a cause of action against persons acting under color of state law who have violated rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution. *Buckley v. City of Redding*, 66 F.3d 190 (9th Cir. 1995). The Constitution's due process clause applies to states but not to private actors. However, private actors are not always free from suit for violating the Constitution. Constitutional standards protect those harmed by private actors when it is fair to say that the state is responsible for the offending conduct. To succeed on a § 1983 civil rights claim against a private actor, a claimant must prove that the private actor was a state actor.

To determine if an apparently private actor may still be a state actor, no one set of circumstances or criteria is sufficient. Rather, courts typically consider the range of circumstances when characterizing a private actor as a state actor for § 1983 purposes. Each set of factual circumstances must be examined in light of the critical question: whether "the State is responsible for the specific conduct of which the plaintiff complains." *Brentwood Acad. v. Tennessee Secondary Sch. Athletic Ass'n,* 531 U.S. 288 (2001).

There are two tests of those circumstances creating state action that are pertinent to Lake's claims. First, state action exists where the private actor was engaged in a public function delegated by the state. If the private actor exercises a function that has traditionally been a public or sovereign function, the private actor is not free from constitutional limits when performing that function. Second, a private actor engages in state action when the state exercises its coercive or influential power over the private actor or when there are pervasive entanglements between the private actor and the state. Under this test, "a state normally can be held responsible for a private decision only when it has exercised coercive power or has provided such significant encouragement . . . that the choice must in law be deemed to be that of the state." *Rendell-Baker v. Kohn*, 457 U.S. 830 (1982).

Under either of these two tests, there is a further requirement to find state action: there must be such a "close nexus between the State and the challenged action that seemingly private behavior may be fairly treated as that of the state itself." *Brentwood.*

Public function

Lake claims that Mega is engaged in a public function, relying on *West v. Atkins,* 487 U.S. 42 (1988), and on *Camp v. Airport Festival* (15th Cir. 2001). In *West,* a privately employed doctor was a state actor when he was employed to provide medical care to inmates in a state prison. The state is required to provide medical care to those it imprisons, and when the doctor contracted with the state to provide that care, he became a state actor.

In *Camp*, the plaintiff sued Airport Festival, a private nonprofit entity created to organize an aviation festival, for violating his First Amendment rights when he was arrested for leafleting during the festival. The city's police department had been directed to follow the instructions of festival organizers regarding security and arrests. Only the state has the power to deprive persons of their freedom by arresting them. When festival organizers accepted the authority to instruct the police regarding arrests, festival organizers became state actors.

Other examples of activities found to be public functions constituting state action include operating a local primary election, operating a post office, and providing for public safety through fire protection and animal control. Courts have narrowly construed the public function test to require that the action be one that is exclusively within the state's powers. Thus, courts have rejected claims that those who operate hospitals, privately owned public utilities, or schools, or provide foster care are performing public functions. While the state sometimes performs these functions, they are not traditionally the *exclusive* prerogative of the state. Over the years, private organizations have often initiated and performed these functions.

Here, the State of Franklin established a state-operated lottery in 1985. In 2005, due to the financial costs of operating a lottery, Franklin entered into a contract with Mega to operate the lottery, with the profits reverting to the state. Operating a lottery is not a traditional function of state government. Many private entities operate similar activities through racetracks, casinos, sweepstakes, and other activities. Thus, Mega is not engaged in a public function.

State coercion or influence, or pervasive entanglement

Lake next argues that there is state action because the state has coerced or influenced Mega to act. Lake argues that because Franklin contracts with Mega to operate the lottery, with the profits from the lottery becoming state proceeds, its influence over Mega is significant, if not coercive. She also argues that Franklin coerces Mega through its extensive regulation of the lottery, making Mega an agent of the state.

Lake's argument fails in light of the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Rendell-Baker*. That case involved employees who claimed that their First Amendment rights were violated when they were discharged by a private school. The plaintiffs argued that the state's extensive regulation of education made the school a state actor. The Court rejected this argument because the state did not regulate, encourage, or compel the private board of trustees to fire the employees. Any government regulation was directed to education of the children, and did not compel the board to follow any particular personnel policies.

The state's exercise of its coercive power or influence must be such that the private choice can be said to be that of the state. Lake has failed to show any evidence that the State of Franklin required, recommended, or even knew about this, or any, personnel action. What the state regulates is the operation of the lottery, not the hiring and firing of Mega's employees.

Lake also argues that even if the state did not coerce Mega, there are additional pervasive state-private entanglements. She relies on *Brentwood,* 531 U.S. at 288. There, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the "nominally private character of the Association" could not overcome the pervasive entanglement with public institutions. Lake maintains that Franklin and Mega are entangled because of Franklin's heavy regulation of the lottery.

In *Brentwood*, the defendant Association regulated interscholastic athletic competition among public and private high schools in Tennessee. The Association's board found that Brentwood, one of the Association's member schools, had violated a rule prohibiting "undue influence" in recruiting athletes and, among other things, declared Brentwood's teams ineligible to compete in playoffs for two years. Brentwood sued the Association, alleging violation of its First and Fourteenth Amendment rights when the school was penalized for violating Association rules. The Association argued that it was not a state actor. The Court found that the Association's board of directors was composed primarily of representatives of public schools. The board effectively operated the sports program for the state's public high schools. The State Department

of Education formally adopted the Association's rules as the rules for public school sports programs. Based on these findings, the Court rejected the Association's claim, concluding that the relationship of the public schools and the Association constituted a pervasive entanglement that made the Association a state actor.

Lake also points to the pervasive entanglements in *Camp* as analogous to the State's control here over the lottery. In *Camp*, although the festival was organized by a nonprofit entity, the city permitted the festival to use the airport grounds at no cost; the city's personnel were extensively involved in planning for the festival while on city time and at city expense; the city promoted the festival through its tourism bureau; and the city's airport personnel controlled access of airplanes during the festival's air show. As noted *supra*, the city's police and first responders were effectively turned over to the festival organizers for the duration of the festival. These entanglements were extensive.

In contrast, the primary relationship between the State of Franklin and Mega is a contract, no different from that between the state and any other contractor. The State of Franklin contracts with private entities to build its buildings, deliver food for its prisoners, and furnish office supplies to state legislators, to name but a few contracts. These contracts do not constitute the sort of pervasive entanglement necessary to constitute state action. When the state enters into a contract to build a state building, the contract demands compliance with many regulations, yet it is left to the contractor to execute the contract. Franklin does not involve itself in the governance of Mega. It does not endorse Mega's personnel policies as the state had in *Brentwood* when the state Department of Education approved the Association's rules. Nor does Franklin involve itself directly in the operation of Mega as the city did in running the airport festival at issue in *Camp*.

Connection to offending conduct: nexus

Even if Lake had met one or both of the tests discussed above, Lake has failed to meet the further requirement of *Rendell-Baker* that there be a nexus, meaning a connection, between the state and the challenged action. That is, Lake has not shown that the offending conduct—her being discharged without due process—was somehow connected to the state's influence over Mega. Lake was discharged by Mega in the same way that any private corporation fires any employee. The state played no role in the discharge, so Lake cannot show the required nexus. Lake offers no facts that rise to the level of the circumstances where the state and private parties

NOTES

MULTISTATE PERFORMANCE TEST DIRECTIONS

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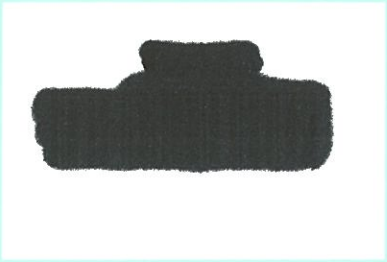

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In re Zimmer Farm

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In re Zimmer Farm

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FILE

State of Franklin
County of Hartford
Office of the County Attorney
92 Oak Street
Glenview, Franklin 33705

MEMORANDUM

TO: Examinee
FROM: Carl S. Burns, County Attorney
DATE: July 25, 2017
RE: Complaints about Zimmer Farm

The county board president, Nina Ortiz, is concerned about activities at the John and Edward Zimmer farm on Prairie Road, and specifically about the bird rescue operation and bird festivals they operate on their farm. Ms. Ortiz has received numerous complaints from local residents about the activities at the farm. While she supports the concept of a bird rescue operation, Ms. Ortiz would like the bird operation moved to a location far away from any residential subdivisions. She also wants the festivals stopped. She has asked me to research whether the county's zoning ordinance can limit the Zimmers' operations. Further, she wants to know whether the Franklin Right to Farm Act (FRFA), which protects certain farms and farming activities, applies here.

In addition to the bird rescue operation and the festivals, the Zimmer farm produces apples and strawberries for local sale. The Zimmers' apple and strawberry cultivation and sales are permitted under the applicable county zoning ordinance. I want you to focus on the bird rescue operation and the festivals—the activities the neighbors are complaining about. Please prepare an objective memorandum for me analyzing these questions:

1. Is the Zimmers' bird rescue operation permitted under the county zoning ordinance?
2. Are the Zimmers' festivals permitted under the county zoning ordinance?
3. How, if at all, does the FRFA affect the county's ability to enforce its zoning ordinance with respect to the bird rescue operation and the festivals?

In your analysis, address any counter arguments the Zimmers may make in support of the bird rescue operation and the festivals. Address only the questions I have raised above. Do not draft a separate statement of facts, but be sure to incorporate the relevant facts, analyze the applicable legal authorities, and explain how the facts and law affect your analysis.

Email to County Board President

TO: Nina Ortiz, County Board President (ctybdpres@Hartford.gov)
FROM: Sally Wendell (swendell@cmail.com)
DATE: May 8, 2017
SUBJECT: Zimmer farm complaints

I am writing on behalf of homeowners living in Country Manors and Orchard Estates, near the Zimmer farm. For the past two years, the Zimmers have run a bird rescue operation. The birds create noise and offensive smells and attract flies, all of which bother us. We cannot sit or eat outside or use our outdoor grills because of the bird noise, odors, and bugs. We did not have this problem before the Zimmers began their bird rescue operation. Just come out some evening and see for yourself how bad it is!

Last year, the Zimmers also hosted several bird festivals with music and food. People who came to these festivals parked on the streets in our subdivisions and walked to and from the farm, littering our streets and yards. Plus the music got pretty loud and we could hear it whether we wanted to or not. The Zimmers are planning more festivals, maybe even every month.

We paid good money for our homes because we wanted some quiet country living—that's why we moved here. Now our neighborhood is becoming like a downtown entertainment center. We taxpayers and homeowners want you to shut down the Zimmers' bird rescue operation and stop these festivals.

A taxpaying citizen,
Sally Wendell

MEMORANDUM

TO: Carl S. Burns, County Attorney
FROM: Judy Abernathy, Investigator
DATE: June 19, 2017
RE: Zimmer farm complaints

On June 14, 2017, I interviewed John Zimmer and his son Edward regarding neighbors' complaints about the Zimmers' farming activities.

As soon as I arrived at the Zimmer farm, Edward Zimmer said, "I know why you are here—just tell those neighbors 'Right to Farm.' They knew they were moving to a farm area—what did they expect?"

John Zimmer provided some background. When his parents, Gus and Ann Zimmer, purchased the property in 1951, it consisted of an apple orchard and a strawberry field. Gus and Ann continued that operation and began growing vegetables after purchasing additional land in 1960. They sold the fruit and vegetables to local grocery stores. In 1985, John and his wife, Darlene, took over the operation and expanded their produce sales to three farmers' markets.

In 1988, the Zimmers began a tradition of holding a one-day annual apple festival for their children's school. School families arrived by bus with their children and picked apples, which were for sale. The families played games and listened to music. There were approximately 100 persons in attendance.

In 2007, the Zimmers suffered several losses—a late spring freeze that ruined the strawberry crop, tough financial times, and some serious health setbacks for Darlene. In 2009, their son Edward moved to the farm to help. Darlene died in 2010. John and Edward continue to produce apples and strawberries for sale locally, but they discontinued the vegetable operation.

In 2015, Edward, who is trained as a veterinary assistant, began taking in wounded ducks, geese, owls, quail, pheasants, hawks—pretty much any fowl or bird that had been hurt. People from miles around bring him wounded birds. Edward made improvements in some of the outbuildings and now cares for as many as 100 birds at a time. I inspected the buildings where the birds are kept and did not observe any obvious threats to public health.

Edward's goal is to care for the birds until they can be released back to the wild, but those that cannot be rehabilitated stay on the farm. Edward does not sell the birds, does not make any profit from the operation, and does not intend to do so. He loves to rescue birds.

Last year, Edward and John said they took a clue from agritourism, a development in the last 20 years that uses entertainment and public educational activities to market and sell agricultural products. The Zimmers held four weekend festivals at their farm in 2016. They showed me a flyer used to advertise the fall festivals. It was titled "Fall Bird Festival" and said "Support injured birds, listen to music, have a good time. Buy apples and discover the best recipes for baking with fruit." The flyer listed details such as hours of the festival, directions, etc.

As many as 200 people attended the festivals each day. To attract people to the festivals, the Zimmers had vendors provide food and drinks, and local musicians offered musical entertainment. A local chef offered two sessions on cooking and baking with fruit; the Zimmers also sold apples or strawberries, depending on the season, and cookbooks.

Each day of the festival, Edward gave a one-hour program about birds. To raise funds for his bird rescue operation, Edward sold bird-related souvenirs, including T-shirts, caps, and books. Guests were encouraged to "adopt" a wounded bird by donating to its care and upkeep. Profits from the bird-related souvenirs, along with the donations, were used to underwrite the bird rescue operation. The Zimmers plan more bird festivals this year.

I also visited the two adjoining subdivisions, both of which were developed in the 1990s. Before that residential development, the land on both sides of the 30-acre Zimmer property was farmland for over 100 years. Presently, all lots in both subdivisions have been sold and developed. Country Manors, which lies to the east of the Zimmer farm, consists of upscale homes. Orchard Estates, which lies to the west of the farm, consists of moderately priced homes very attractive to families due to a number of playgrounds and park areas within the subdivision. About 20 of the homes in Country Manors border the Zimmer Farm, and about 30 of the Orchard Estates properties border the farm. Both subdivisions are zoned R-1, single-family residential.

On June 15, I reviewed public records and confirmed that Zimmer Farms Inc. has owned the property in question since 1951. The Zimmer farm is zoned Agricultural A-1. As you know, Hartford County has countywide zoning. Most property is either single- or multi-family residential, light industrial, or agricultural. The permitted uses for A-1 zoned areas are specified in the zoning ordinance. Growing apples and strawberries for commercial sale, as the Zimmers have done, is permitted in an A-1 zone.

LIBRARY

EXCERPTS FROM HARTFORD COUNTY ZONING CODE

Title 15. ZONING

§ 22. Agricultural A-1 District Permitted Uses

(a) Within an A-1 district, the following uses are permitted:

(1) any agricultural use;

(2) incidental processing, packaging, storage, transportation, distribution, sale, or agricultural accessory use intended to add value to agricultural products produced on the premises or to ready such products for market;

. . .

(b) Definitions

. . .

(2) "Agricultural use" means any activities conducted for the purpose of producing an income or livelihood from one or more of the following agricultural products:

(a) crops or forage (such as corn, soybeans, fruits, vegetables, wheat, hay, alfalfa)

(b) livestock (such as cattle, swine, sheep, and goats)

(c) beehives

(d) poultry (such as chickens, geese, ducks, and turkeys)

(e) nursery plants, sod, or Christmas trees

. . .

An agricultural use does not lose its character as such because it involves noise, dust, odors, heavy equipment, spraying of chemicals, or long hours of operation.

(3) "Agricultural accessory use" means one of the following activities:

(a) a seasonal farm stand, provided that it is operated for less than six months per year and is used for the sale of one or more agricultural products produced on the premises;

(b) special events, provided that they are three or fewer per year and are directly related to the sale or marketing of one or more agricultural products produced on the premises.

EXCERPTS FROM FRANKLIN AGRICULTURE CODE
Ch. 75 Franklin Right to Farm Act

§ 2. Definitions

(a) "Farm" means the land, plants, animals, buildings, structures (including ponds used for agricultural or aquacultural activities), machinery, equipment, and other appurtenances used in the commercial production of farm products.

(b) "Farm operation" means the operation and management of a farm or an activity that occurs on a farm in connection with the commercial production, harvesting, and storage of farm products.

§ 3. Farm not nuisance

(a) A farm or farm operation shall not be found to be a public or private nuisance and shall be protected under section 4 of this Act if the farm or farm operation existed before a change in the land use or occupancy of land that borders the farmland, and if, before that change in land use or occupancy of land, the farm or farm operation would not have been a nuisance.

(b) A farm or farm operation that is protected under subsection (a) shall not be found to be a public or private nuisance as a result of any of the following:

(i) a change in ownership;

(ii) temporary cessation or interruption of farming;

(iii) enrollment in a governmental program; or

(iv) adoption of new technology.

§ 4. Local units of government

Except as otherwise provided in this section, a local unit of government shall not enact, maintain, or enforce an ordinance, regulation, or resolution that conflicts with this Act and undermines the purpose of this Act.

Effective July 1, 1983.

REPORT FROM FRANKLIN SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
Pertaining to S.B. 1198, May 3, 1983

S.B. 1198 will be known as the Franklin Right to Farm Act and will protect Franklin farmland. During each of the past several years, two to three million acres of U.S. farmland have been converted to nonagricultural uses. Franklin's agricultural resources play an important role in feeding the population of Franklin, the United States, and the world. Loss of farmland imperils 2.2 million agriculture-related U.S. jobs, the habitats of 75% of our wildlife, and open spaces necessary for a healthy environment. Loss of farmland creates urban sprawl with the attendant stresses on the infrastructures of Franklin's formerly rural counties and small towns.

When land that was formerly agricultural is converted to residential land, new home dwellers, not familiar with rural life, complain of odors, noise, dust, and insects caused by animals, crops, and farm machinery. Too often these new residents file nuisance suits against their farming neighbors. Additionally, local ordinances enacted in response to residents' concerns threaten farmers with fines and/or closure if they are in noncompliance with the restrictions imposed by the ordinances. These restraints and costly lawsuits by nonfarming neighbors discourage farmers from investing in their farms and remaining on them.

S.B. 1198 protects those who farm for a living. A farming operation that was not previously a nuisance does not become one when residential development moves in next to the farmland. To qualify for this protection, farmers must show that the farm operation would not have been a nuisance at the time of the changes in the area. This protection applies to those who make their living farming, whether in an agricultural area or in a residential area, not to those with gardens for personal use. Under the common law, "coming to a nuisance," such as building a home next to a cattle operation, was ordinarily a defense for the farmer. However, courts have been reluctant to afford this defense wide applicability. This reluctance adds to the uncertainty facing farmers. S.B. 1198 codifies this common law defense and protects those who farm for a living.

Accordingly, this Committee declares that it is this state's policy to conserve, protect, and encourage the development and improvement of its agricultural land for the commercial production of food and other agricultural products, by limiting the circumstances under which a farming operation may be deemed to be a nuisance.

Shelby Township v. Beck
Franklin Court of Appeal (2005)

The issue on appeal is whether the Franklin Right to Farm Act (FRFA or "the Act") preempts a local zoning ordinance.

In 1995, the Becks purchased 1.75 acres of property in Shelby Township. The property had been used for raising chickens, and there were chicken coops on the property when the Becks purchased it. In 1995, the land use plan for the township allowed farming on this land. In 1996, the Becks began raising chickens for sale at local butcher shops. In 1998, Shelby Township passed Zoning Ordinance 7.0, which requires farms to have a minimum size of three acres. In 2000, several real estate developers began to build homes near the Becks' property. Neighbors began complaining to the Township Board about the smells and noise from the Becks' chickens. The neighbors filed a petition with the Township Board, asking it to close down the Becks' operation because it was a nuisance. In 2004, the Township Board decided that the best way to close down the Becks' farm was to enforce its ordinance regarding minimum farm size. The Township sued to enforce its ordinance, and the Becks moved to dismiss, claiming that FRFA preempts the ordinance. The trial court granted the motion, and the Township appealed.

State law can preempt a municipal ordinance in two ways. First, preemption occurs when a statute completely occupies the field that the ordinance attempts to regulate. FRFA does not "occupy the field," because the legislature has also authorized local governments to enact zoning laws concerning agricultural properties. Second, preemption occurs when an ordinance conflicts with a state statute and undermines its purpose. A conflict exists when the ordinance permits what the statute prohibits or vice versa. Determining whether there is a conflict requires a careful reading of the statute and the ordinance in light of the policy and purposes behind the statute and measuring the degree to which the ordinance frustrates the achievement of the state's objectives.

If Shelby Ordinance 7.0 is in effect, the Becks cannot raise chickens on their property because it is under the minimum size required for a farm. However, Section 4 of FRFA provides that a local ordinance is preempted when it conflicts with FRFA. The question then is whether there is a conflict. Section 2 of FRFA defines a "farm" as "land, plants, animals, buildings, structures . . . and other appurtenances used in the commercial production of farm products." The Act does not set a minimum acreage for farms. Here, the Becks' operation—raising chickens for sale—is protected by FRFA because it is the commercial production of farm products, even

though the operation takes place on only 1.75 acres. Thus, there is a conflict between the size requirement of the ordinance, which prohibits the Becks from raising chickens, and FRFA, which does not. Thus the ordinance and FRFA are in direct conflict, as the ordinance prohibits what is permitted by the Act. The ordinance undermines the very purpose of the Act by prohibiting this farm operation.

The Township's effort to use its size ordinance to prevent what the neighbors believe is a nuisance is the very sort of enforcement action that FRFA is designed to prevent. FRFA states that a farm shall not be found to be a nuisance if it existed before the change in land use and if, before that change, it would not have been found to be a nuisance. The Becks' operation began in 1995, before the residential development neighboring it was created. In 1995, the Becks' farm operation was a permitted use and would not have been a nuisance. Accordingly, the Becks' operation is protected by FRFA.

Our conclusion that the state law preempts the local ordinance also serves the purpose of the Act, which is to conserve land for agricultural operations and protect it from the threat of extinction by regulation from local governmental units. *See* Sen. Rpt. Comm. Agric. 1983.

Affirmed.

Wilson v. Monaco Farms
Franklin Court of Appeal (2008)

Defendant Monaco Farms (Monaco) has operated a dairy farm on its property from 1940 to the present, with changes in the ownership passing from father to son in 1970, and to granddaughter in 2000. Monaco increased the number of dairy cows on the farm from 40 to 60 in 2005, and from 60 to 200 in 2007.

Plaintiff Bill Wilson has lived in the subdivision immediately to the east of Monaco since 1990. In 2007 he filed a private nuisance action against Monaco, alleging that the flies, dust, and odors from the dairy cows interfered with his enjoyment of his property. Monaco moved to dismiss, relying on the Franklin Right to Farm Act (FRFA), which it claims continues to protect a farm operation when it expands or changes its operation. In response, Wilson argued that FRFA does not protect a farm whose expansion created a nuisance not present at the time he purchased his property. The trial court granted the motion to dismiss, and Wilson appealed. We affirm.

The present situation is the very sort of farm operation the legislature intended to protect when it enacted FRFA. Monaco has existed since 1940, and it would not have been a nuisance at that time. In 1984, the land bordering Monaco was subdivided and developed into a residential area and was zoned residential.

There were no complaints about the operation of Monaco until 2007, when it expanded from 60 to 200 cows. The question is whether FRFA continues to protect Monaco after the expansion. When it enacted FRFA, the legislature understood that circumstances could change and provided that certain changes would not affect the protections of FRFA. Section 3(b)(i) of FRFA addresses the issue of change in ownership but does not address changes in size or nature of the operation.

Wilson argues that because the legislature listed four, and only four, contemplated interruptions or changes in farm operations, those are exclusive and exhaustive. If Wilson is correct, the only changes the legislature intended to protect are the four items specified in the statute, and those four do not include expansion of farm operations.

Monaco, on the other hand, argues that where the legislature provides a list, the court must determine what is common among the items on the list and then consider whether the matter at issue is sufficiently similar to the items listed as to be included. Monaco argues that the

change in size of the operation is similar to a change in technology, which does not destroy the protections of FRFA. Both changes have as their purpose the opportunity to increase farm production and thus profitability.

Both parties assume that the court must look to § 3(b) of FRFA. A better approach is to examine § 3(a), which provides that a farm "shall not be found to be a public or private nuisance . . . if the farm or farm operation existed before a change in the land use or occupancy of land that borders the farmland . . . ." Thus, the statute provides a date for measuring whether a nuisance exists, namely the date when the use of the neighboring land changed. In this case, that date is 1984, the year that the neighboring land was subdivided and developed into a residential area. The legislature may have assumed that farms might expand. Indeed, it noted in § 3(b) the possibility of change in technology. Nevertheless, the legislature established only one date for measuring whether a nuisance exists.

The purpose of FRFA is "to conserve, protect, and encourage the development and improvement of [Franklin's] agricultural land for the commercial production of food and other agricultural products, by limiting the circumstances under which a farming operation may be deemed to be a nuisance." Sen. Rpt. Comm. Agric. 1983. Relying solely on the legislature's date for determining whether a nuisance exists serves the statutory purpose.

When he bought his home in 1990, Wilson knew that he was moving next to a dairy farm. It remains a dairy farm, albeit a larger one. Nothing in FRFA prohibits expansion of farm operations. Despite the expansion of Monaco's dairy operation, it is protected by the Act, and the trial court properly dismissed Wilson's nuisance action.

Affirmed.

Koster v. Presley's Fruit
Columbia Court of Appeal (2010)

In this case, the court is asked to determine the applicability of the Columbia Right to Farm Act (CRFA). The precise issue on appeal is whether the production of wooden pallets for use in harvesting peaches is an agricultural activity protected by the Act.

Defendant Presley's Fruit (Presley's) has grown and sold peaches at its location since 1960. In 2006, Presley's added a new building and began manufacturing wooden pallets for use in harvesting and transporting peaches.

In 1997, plaintiffs Matt and Kathleen Koster purchased residential property that abuts Presley's. They had no complaints about Presley's until 2006, when they began experiencing noise and dust associated with the manufacturing of the wooden pallets. The Kosters filed a nuisance suit against Presley's, claiming that the noise and dust is a nuisance that substantially and unreasonably interferes with their enjoyment of their property.

Presley's moved to dismiss, claiming the protections of CRFA. CRFA states that a farm operation which existed one year before the change in the area is not a nuisance if it would not have been a nuisance at the time of the change in the property. The trial court granted the motion.

On appeal, the Kosters argue that CRFA protects only farm activities and not manufacturing. Presley's claims that the pallets are needed to harvest and transport the peaches (a farm product) to market and that therefore the manufacturing of the pallets is protected by CRFA.

Resolving this question requires the court to interpret and apply the provisions of CRFA. Our role in construing a statute is to "ascertain and give effect to the legislative intent." *Brady v. Roberts Electrical Mfg., Inc.* (Columbia Sup. Ct. 1999).

We must examine the Columbia statute's text and give the words their natural and ordinary meaning in light of their statutory context. If the statutory language is clear and unambiguous, the court must apply the statute's plain language and not venture beyond the text to add words not there. However, when the statutory language is unclear, the court may refer to the purpose of the legislation and the legislative history of the statute, such as legislative committee reports, to aid us in interpreting the text.

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