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Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals

(Note: You may access the court's opinion by clicking on the case name)

Court Holds That Magistrate Judge and District Court Judge Failed to Apply Correct Legal Standard in Prisoner's Lawsuit Against Prison Officials For Violating His Eighth Amendment Right to Be Free From Cruel and Unusual Punishment

[Makdessi v. Fields](#), ___ F.3d ___, 2015 WL 1062747 (March 12, 2015). Plaintiff, a Virginia prisoner, sued prison officials for violating his Eighth Amendment right to be free from cruel and unusual punishment. He alleged that he had file multiple complaints to prison officials about physical and sexual abuse by other prisoners that had resulted in serious injury to him, and the officials had not taken reasonable measures to guarantee his safety. A federal magistrate conducted a bench trial and filed a report and recommended judgment with the district court in favor of the defendant prison officials, which was adopted by the district court judge. The fourth circuit reversed the judgment. The court discussed the two-prong test of *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825 (1994), and held that the magistrate judge and district court judge failed to appreciate that the subjective "actual knowledge" standard required to find deliberate indifference under the Eighth Amendment may be proved by circumstantial evidence that a substantial risk of serious harm to a prisoner from other prisoners was so obvious that it had to be known by prison officials.