

Circuit Court for Talbot County  
Case No. C-20-FM-23-000203

UNREPORTED  
IN THE APPELLATE COURT  
OF MARYLAND\*

No. 1245

September Term, 2024

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JAHARI D. COPPER

v.

NATASHA L. COPPER, ET AL.

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Graeff,  
Zic,  
Sharer, J. Frederick  
(Senior Judge, Specially Assigned),

JJ.

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Opinion by Graeff, J.

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Filed: June 23, 2026

\*This is an unreported opinion. This opinion may not be cited as precedent within the rule of stare decisis. It may be cited for persuasive value only if the citation conforms to Md. Rule 1-104(a)(2)(B).

In this appeal, Jahari D. Copper (“Father”), appellant, challenges an August 2, 2024 order of the Circuit Court for Talbot County requiring him to pay Natasha L. Cooper (“Mother”) child support in the amount of \$754.00 per month, pursuant to a Complaint to Establish Child Support brought by the Talbot County Office of Child Support (“Talbot County”), appellee. Father also challenges the court’s July 30, 2024 order denying relief he sought in numerous filings, alleging that the child support enforcement action violated state, federal, and constitutional law.

On appeal, Father presents several questions for review,<sup>1</sup> which we have consolidated and rephrased, as follows:

1. Did the circuit court abuse its discretion in removing Father from the child support hearing finding Father in contempt of court and then continuing the hearing in Father’s absence?
2. Did the circuit court err in denying Father’s various requests for relief based on his assertions that he is not subject to the authority of the government or judiciary and that the child support enforcement order violated federal and constitutional law?

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<sup>1</sup> Father is not represented by counsel in this appeal. His questions on appeal were, as follows:

1. Whether the lower court’s denial of Appellant’s filings without legal basis violates procedural due process.
2. Whether child support obligations require the presence of a valid contract.
3. Whether the court acted within its discretion by detaining Appellant and proceeding in his absence.
4. Whether Title IV-D creates perverse financial incentives for court to enforce fraudulent orders.
5. Whether the court’s refusal to respond to certified mail inquiries constitutes a violation of 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

For the reasons set forth below, we shall affirm the judgment of the circuit court.

### **FACTUAL AND PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND**

Father and Mother were married on May 26, 2007, and they have two children together. At the time of the child support hearing, only one of their children, J., born on September 18, 2007, was a minor.<sup>2</sup> On August 30, 2023, Mother filed a complaint for absolute divorce. She requested primary physical and joint legal custody of J., as well as child support. Father did not file an answer to Mother's complaint, and on October 19, 2023, the court entered an order of default against him.

On January 26, 2024, a magistrate held a hearing on the complaint for absolute divorce. Neither party was represented by counsel, and Father chose not to participate in the hearing.<sup>3</sup> Father did not file a request to vacate the default judgment. The magistrate determined that both parties waived their right to request alimony, that Father waived his right to a monetary award, and that Mother's request for a monetary award must be denied because the parties did not own any property together. The magistrate found that J. lived primarily with Mother and J. had not had contact with Father since October 2023. She determined that it was in J.'s best interest that Mother be awarded sole legal and physical custody. Mother requested child support, but she was unable to present evidence of

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<sup>2</sup> In the interest of privacy, we refer to the minor child by the initial, J.

<sup>3</sup> The court scheduled a virtual hearing on the complaint for absolute divorce for January 8, 2024, pursuant to an Order of Default entered against Father on October 19, 2023. Because Father contested Mother's custody request, however, the court rescheduled the matter for a two hour in-person merits hearing on January 26, 2024.

Father's income at the hearing. The magistrate recommend that Mother be granted an absolute divorce on the grounds of a six-month separation. On February 9, 2024, the court issued an order ratifying the findings and recommendations of the magistrate, and it awarded Mother an absolute divorce from Father, as well as sole legal and physical custody of J.

On March 20, 2024, Talbot County filed a Complaint to Establish Child Support on Mother's behalf. The complaint requested an order directing the payment of child support, and medical and dental expenses of the minor children, retroactive to the date of the filing of the complaint. Father did not file an answer to the complaint.

Instead, beginning on May 23, 2024, he filed a series of papers challenging the court's jurisdiction and authority over him, the first of which was a form document, entitled "Violation Warning, Denial of Rights Under Color of Law," addressed to the magistrate. The document warned the magistrate that she "may be in violation of Federal law" and to "cease and desist with [her] demand." Other filings included a notice of "Special Appearance" "**FOR THE COURT TO PROVE IT HAS JURISDICTION TO PROCEED IN THIS MATTER,**" and a copy of the summons served upon Father with a handwritten demand for "proof of CLAIM as to [the court's] LEGAL or lawful authority as a public servant to bother [him] at all."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In its July 30, 2024 order, the court stated that these were filed on May 24, 2024. Odyssey lists the filing date as May 23, 2024.

On May 30, 2024, Father filed a notice of “Special Appearance,” expressly reserving affirmative defenses related to “standing, service and sufficiency of process, subject matter jurisdiction, joinder, venue, and other strictly procedural and jurisdictional defenses.” On June 7, 2024, Father filed another form “Violation Warning,” asserting a “Denial of Rights Under Color of Law” against the magistrate, and a request for judicial notice of case law and regulations relating to child support and paternity.

On June 10, 2024, Father filed a “Motion to Dismiss Title IV-D Hearing for Violations of CFR, U.S.C., and Constitutional Law.” He requested dismissal based on: (1) lack of jurisdiction; (2) lack of voluntary contract; (3) violation of separation of powers; (4) due process violations; (5) unlawful use of bank levy and security bonds; and (6) misrepresentation of IV-D agencies as courts.<sup>5</sup> On June 21, 2024, Father filed a second motion to dismiss, alleging violations of the Administrative Procedure Act and the Fifth Amendment. He asserted additional grounds for dismissal based on the separation of powers doctrine and contractual and jurisdictional requirements for child support enforcement.

On June 26, 2024, Father filed an affidavit stating that he was not subject to “codes, statutes, or regulations not constitutionally applicable to a natural person” and requesting

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<sup>5</sup> IV-D refers to Title IV, Part D, of the Social Security Act of 1975, 42 U.S.C. §§ 651 *et seq.*, which “conditions state receipt of federal funding upon the state’s passage of . . . provisions” addressing child and spousal support enforcement. *Nusbaum v. Nusbaum*, 243 Md. App. 653, 679 (2019), *cert. denied*, 467 Md. 705 (2020), *cert. denied*, 141 S.Ct. 556.

removal of his name from the birth certificate of J.<sup>6</sup> On July 8, 2024, Father filed a “Notice of Demand for Personal Responsibility Contract,” which demanded information and documents he claimed were required by law to hold him liable for child support. He also filed interrogatories directed to an unspecified recipient, requesting admissions to various legal assertions, as well as correspondence to the Child Support Enforcement Office demanding that it cease and desist all child support actions against him.

On July 8, 2024, the court denied Father’s Motions to Dismiss. Over the next few weeks, Father filed a flurry of other papers. On July 10, 2024, Father filed a request for recusal of the hearing judge, arguing that the current judge’s impartiality was compromised because he was “under contract with the IV-D agency” and was a member of the same bar association as the Talbot County attorney. On July 15, 2024, Father filed a request for clarification of the court’s order denying his motion to dismiss, and on July 24, 2024, he filed a complaint against the court and Talbot County for failure to respond to his earlier correspondence and alleged constitutional violations.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In its July 30, 2024 order, the court states that the affidavit was filed on July 1, 2024. The filing date on Odyssey is June 26, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> On July 17, 2024, appellant filed a request for information, under the Public Information Act, pertaining to the child support enforcement action. On July 26, 2024, he filed several judicial notices stating, among other things, that he is a free and natural man “distinct from any legal fiction or entity,” that he did “not consent to being identified, treated, or otherwise recognized as the legal person or entity of JAHARAI DEMON COPPER,” and that any contracts involving him were unenforceable. The orders at issue in this case did not address these filings.

### **Child Support Hearing**

On July 26, 2024, the court held a hearing on the complaint for child support. When the court asked if Father was present, he responded: “Objection, Your Honor. No, Mr. Copper is not present. I am the Respondent.” Father immediately requested to approach the bench, which the court denied, and then Father asked whether his “inalienable rights [we]re still in full effect.” After Father asked a second time to approach the bench “with [his] inalienable rights in full effect,” the court denied his request and told him to sit down. The following exchange then took place:

THE DEFENDANT: I’m not just sitting down. Can you answer my question please?

THE COURT: Sir, if you disrupt this courtroom I’m going to have you removed.

THE DEFENDANT: This is not even courtroom. All of you in here are 4D contractors. This is not a courtroom.

THE COURT: Mr. Copper.

THE DEFENDANT: And it’s all in my paperwork. And you can see it right here.

THE COURT: Mr. Copper sit down.

THE DEFENDANT: Can you take this to the Judge because both of them have 4D contracts with each other and the State[?]

THE COURT: Mr. Copper sit down.

THE DEFENDANT: Can I take a seat with my inalienable rights in full effect? Can you answer the question[?]

THE COURT: No. You, I want you to sit.

THE DEFENDANT: Are you a (inaudible) and neutral Judge because I also put that in[?]

THE COURT: Sit down. All right. Mr. Bailiff.

THE DEFENDANT No, you not answering none of my questions (inaudible).

THE BAILIFF: Yes, Your Honor.

THE COURT: You may want to get some assistance in here.

THE DEFENDANT Get some assistance for what? It's because you're not answering my question.

THE COURT: Sir, you're disrupting this [c]ourt and I'm not going to tolerate it.

THE DEFENDANT: No, you're not affording me my due process is what's going on. That's what's going on.

THE COURT: Sir. Sir, you're...

THE DEFENDANT: You're not affording me my due process. I asked you simple questions. Yes or no can I take the stand with my inalienable rights in full effect?

THE COURT: Mr. Copper sit down.

THE DEFENDANT: And that is not doing anything but asking a question.

THE COURT: Mr. Copper you are in contempt of this court of my opinion.

THE DEFENDANT: Can you prove that this is a court because 4D is quasi judicial (inaudible)[?]

THE COURT: Mr. Copper.

THE DEFENDANT: And I also had that right here too.

THE COURT: Mr. Copper.

THE DEFENDANT: It's quasi judicial in nature. All of you all are contractors under 4D and . . .

THE COURT: Mr. Copper if you don't sit down and be quiet I'm going to have you removed.

THE DEFENDANT: If you don't answer my questions I am going to sit in a USC Subsection 1983. You all are violating my due process rights right now. So we can play this game if you want to.

THE COURT: No, we're not going to play games.

THE DEFENDANT: I know we're not because we're going to end it right now. All you have to do is answer my question. You can't even answer simple question. I have a lot of paperwork here that is also filed with this court that needs to be addressed.

THE COURT: All right. Sir, I find you, I find you in contempt of court. All right.

THE DEFENDANT: I asked a simple question and you failed to answer a simple question.

THE COURT: You need more assistance or can you remove him?

THE DEFENDANT: And you're trying to get your toy soldiers who also are contracted under 4D to say that I'm up here in contempt.

THE COURT: All right, I'm going to order him removed from the courtroom and placed in a cell.

THE DEFENDANT: No, there's no contempt of court. I'm not . . .

THE COURT: Put him in a holding cell.

THE DEFENDANT: No, you can't do that. It's not even a court.

THE COURT: I just did it.

THE DEFENDANT: No, don't put your hands on me man. Don't put your hands on me. I'm not going to no damn holding cell. He's going to answer my questions that's part of the process because all of you all are going to get

(inaudible) Section 1983. I know what's going on. I'm going to sit right there. I'm not going to the holding cell. I'm not going to go contempt of court because it's not court.

Father was then removed from the courtroom. The court instructed the clerk to note that it found Father in contempt of court for disrupting the proceeding and not allowing the court to be heard. The court advised that Father would be held in the Detention Center, in a holding cell, until the case could be finished.

Talbot County moved forward with its case in Father's absence. Mother testified that she earned \$72,919 as a Benefits and Retirement Specialist for the Maryland Judiciary. She was not paying any health insurance for J. and did not make or receive any alimony payments. She did not pay child support in any other matters.

Kristin Bringman, the Talbot County Child Support Supervisor, testified that Talbot County had access to information about Father's salary through the Beacon System, an automatic benefits system in the State that tracks employee income for W-2 records. Ms. Bringman testified that Father was employed by Eurofins Agrosience, and his income was \$32,594 for the first two quarters of 2024, which equaled \$5,432 per month. The court instructed Talbot County to prepare a proposed order in accordance with the child support guidelines, retroactive to April 1, 2024, with arrearages calculated at 25% of the child support order.

On August 1, 2024, the court issued an order directing Father to pay \$754.00 per month for the support and maintenance of J. The order further provided that Father had accumulated arrearages of \$2,262.00, and it ordered Father to pay Mother \$188.50 per

month toward those arrearages until they were paid in full. The court ordered Talbot County to impose an immediate and continued withholding order on all Father's earnings, to be served immediately on his employer.

Two days prior, on July 30, 2024, the court issued an order denying the relief appellant sought in the following outstanding filings:

- May 23, 2024 "Violation Warning Denial of Rights of Color of Law;"
- May 24, 2024 writ of summons demanding the court respond in 21 days with proof of its lawful authority over him;
- May 30, 2024 Notice of Special Appearance;
- June 7, 2024 Request for Judicial Notice;
- June 26, 2024 affidavit requesting removal of his name from his child's birth certificate;
- July 8, 2024 demand that the Maryland Child Support Administration and the Department of Human Services "cease and desist" all child support actions against him, and the Notice of Demand for Personal Responsibility Contract with interrogatories;
- July 10, 2024 request for recusal of the hearing judge;
- July 15, 2024 request for clarification of order denying the motion to dismiss; and
- July 24, 2024 letter of complaint to the county administrative judge.

The court explained that all of the filings appeared to be based on Father's belief that he was a "free man, not subject to the commercial regulations and statutory obligations applied to natural persons." The court stated that it did "not find [Father's] arguments

compelling,” and it ordered “that to the extent [Father’s] outstanding filings described above seek any relief, any relief sought be, and is hereby, **DENIED.**”

This appeal followed.

## DISCUSSION

Father’s brief lists 15 “ISSUES PRESENTED FOR REVIEW” in addition to five questions for this Court. He also seeks remedies, requesting that we (1) vacate the circuit court’s judgment with prejudice, “ensuring the matter cannot be reopened,” (2) award compensatory damages for resources spent defending the action; (3) award punitive damages for judicial misconduct; (4) issue a declaratory judgment affirming Father’s rights under the constitution and federal law; and (5) grant an injunction preventing further enforcement actions based on the order.<sup>8</sup> Although Father’s brief is somewhat difficult to follow and lacks proper citation to factual and legal authority, we shall, nevertheless, address each of Father’s issues and questions presented.

### I.

#### Contempt of Court

We begin with Father’s argument that the circuit court erred in proceeding with the July 26, 2024 hearing on child support after he was found in contempt of court and removed

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<sup>8</sup> We note from the outset that the appellate courts typically do not award damages, issue declaratory judgments, or award injunctive relief. Rather, our role is to review a circuit court’s decision to deny or grant such relief. *See, e.g., Spacesaver Sys., Inc. v. Adam*, 212 Md. App. 422, 435 (2013) (appellate courts review damage awards for clear error), *aff’d*, 440 Md. 1 (2014); *Coates v. Charles Cnty. Bd. of Comm’rs*, 266 Md. App. 266, 287 (decision to grant injunction falls within sound judgment of circuit court), *cert. denied sub nom. Coates v. Stewart*, 492 Md. 446 (2025).

from the courtroom. He contends that he was unlawfully detained, and the court’s decision to proceed with the hearing in his absence “violated [his] right to be present, in violation of the Sixth Amendment and established principles of equitable jurisprudence.”

Talbot County contends that the court did not abuse its discretion when it ordered Father removed from the hearing based on his disruptive conduct. It argues that the court “properly proceeded with the hearing following [Father’s] removal” and that, in doing so, his “constitutional rights were not violated.”

The issue here involves “direct contempt,” which is “contempt committed in the presence of the judge presiding in court or so near to the judge as to interrupt the court’s proceedings.” Md. Rule 15-202(b). Contempt is a “despising of the authority, justice, or dignity of the court . . . a person whose conduct tends to bring the authority and administration of the law into disrespect or disregard . . . or otherwise tends to impede, embarrass, or obstruct the court in the discharge of its duties, has committed a contempt.” *Fisher v. McCrary Crescent City, LLC*, 186 Md. App. 86, 114 (2009), *cert. denied*, 562 U.S. 1060 (2010). A direct contempt “may be summarily punished to protect the orderly administration of justice and vindicate the dignity of the court.” *State v. Crawford*, 239 Md. App. 84, 109 (2018). “In order to constitute a direct contempt, it is not necessary that the conduct bring to a halt the proceedings in progress.” *Mitchell v. State*, 320 Md. 756, 763 (1990). Rather, as the Supreme Court of Maryland has explained:

To preserve order in the court room for the proper conduct of business, the court must act instantly to suppress disturbance or violence or physical obstruction or disrespect to the court when occurring in open court. There is no need of evidence or assistance of counsel before punishment, because the

court has seen the offense. Such summary vindication of the court’s dignity and authority is necessary. It has always been so in the courts of the common law and the punishment imposed is due process of law.

*Id.* at 763 (quoting *Cooke v. United States*, 267 U.S. 517, 534 (1925)).

A circuit court’s determination that an individual is in direct contempt of court is reviewed for abuse of discretion. *Hammonds v. State*, 436 Md. 22, 37 (2013). *Accord Smith v. State*, 382 Md. 329, 337 (2004) (“It is reposed in the first instance in the trial judge’s sound discretion whether to hold an individual in contempt, and his or her decision generally will not be overturned on appellate review absent an abuse of that discretion.”). “Where a defendant is ‘disruptive, contumacious, [and] stubbornly defiant’ in a manner that interferes with the dignity, order, and decorum of a courtroom, the trial court has the discretion to order ‘constitutionally permissible’ accommodations made, after warning the defendant of those potential consequences, up to and including expelling the defendant from the courtroom.” *In re D.M.*, 228 Md. App. 451, 463 (2016) (quoting *Illinois v. Allen*, 397 U.S. 337, 343-44 (1970)).

The court may proceed with a hearing following a party’s removal from the courtroom for direct contempt. *Allen*, 397 U.S. at 346 (court’s decision to remove defendant from the courtroom and continue trial in his absence was not unconstitutional). As the Supreme Court of Maryland has explained, even in criminal cases, a “defendant’s Sixth and Fourteenth Amendment right to be present at his or her trial, though fundamental,

is not absolute” and may be forfeited by consent or misconduct.<sup>9</sup> *Smith*, 382 Md. at 344 n.6. The Sixth Amendment right to be present, however, does not apply to civil proceedings. *In re Adoption/Guardianship No. 6Z980001*, 131 Md. App. 187, 192 (2000). In a civil case, the right of a party “*to be present throughout the trial is not an absolute right,*” and “*in the discretion of the court, with due regards to the circumstances as to prejudice, the case may be tried or finished when a party, including a defendant, is absent.*” *Green v. N. Arundel Hosp. Ass’n*, 366 Md. 597, 619 (2001), *cert. denied*, 535 U.S. 1055 (2002).

Here, as soon as the hearing began, Father was confrontational, recalcitrant, and defiant, and his conduct impeded the court from conducting an orderly hearing. The court asked Father to sit down eight times, but he repeatedly refused, insisting instead that the court answer *his* questions. Father stated: “This is not even a courtroom,” and he argued that “[a]ll of you in here are 4D contractors.” He also claimed that the court was violating his due process rights and threatened to “s[en]d in a USC Subsection 1983” if the court did not answer his questions.

The court gave Father several warnings before removing him. Prior to the contempt finding, the court stated that if Father continued to disrupt the proceeding, he would be removed, and the court was “not going to tolerate [Father’s disruptions].” After stating that Father was in contempt of court, the court gave him one additional opportunity to “sit

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<sup>9</sup> In criminal cases, we have recognized that defendants must be allowed to return to the hearing as soon as the defendant is willing to behave appropriately. *Smith v. State*, 382 Md. 329, 344 n.6 (2004).

down and be quiet,” which Father refused. Once Father was removed, the child support proceeding continued in his absence. The hearing was not lengthy, and the court determined the child support award based on the mandatory statutory formula, using Father’s W-2 documentation.

Under the circumstances, the court did not abuse its discretion in finding Father in contempt and removing him from the hearing. We also perceive no abuse of discretion in the court’s decision to continue the hearing in Father’s absence.

## **II.**

### **Child Support is Not Contractual**

Father contends that the court’s “child support order lacks a legal foundation and should be vacated.” He asserts that child support enforcement “is a contractual matter requiring the presence of a valid agreement,” i.e., “a Personal Responsibility Contract or garnishment contract,” and absent a valid contract, “any enforcement of child support is invalid.”

Talbot County argues that Father “has a legal, not contractual, duty to pay child support.” It asserts that, “[a]s a matter of law, whether [Father] has entered into a contract for the payment of child support or not, he is obligated to obey a court order directing his payment of a specified amount.”

A circuit court’s determination of an appropriate award of child support based on the statutory guidelines “will not be disturbed but for a clear abuse of discretion.” *In re Marriage of Houser*, 490 Md. 592, 605 (2025). We review the circuit court’s factual

findings in support of the award determination, however, for clear error. *Reynolds v. Reynolds*, 216 Md. App. 205, 219 (2014). Where a child support order involves the interpretation and application of Maryland case law and statutes, we conduct a *de novo* review to determine whether the circuit court’s conclusions were legally correct. *Houser*, 490 Md. at 605.

Talbot County is correct that child support is a legal obligation, which does not require a contract and cannot be waived by agreement. *Id.* at 607. Section 5-203(b)(1) of the Family Law Article, provides that parents of a minor child “are jointly and severally responsible for the child’s support, care, nurture, welfare, and education.” Md. Code Ann., Fam. Law (“FL”) § 5-203(b)(1) (2019 Repl. Vol). The obligation to support a minor child is both a legal and moral obligation under Maryland law. *Houser*, 490 Md. at 607. Because a child support obligation is for the benefit of the minor child, the right is held by the child, not “by the parent to whom the child support is paid.” *Id.* Child support “derives from the obligation of the parent to the child, *not from one parent to another.*” *Id.* (quoting *Rand v. Rand*, 40 Md. App. 550, 554 (1978)).

Accordingly, although parents *may* enter into a child support agreement, a court is not obligated to “accept an agreement between parties regarding decisions about their child support obligations,” and a duty to pay child support cannot be waived or bargained away by contract. *Id.* Parents do not have a constitutional right to waive their child’s right to child support, and court-ordered child support does not violate “parents’ fundamental rights in the upbringing of their children” because child support is not a parental right, but rather,

it is a parental obligation. *Id.* at 611-12. Nor do parents have a “liberty interest in avoiding” a child support obligation “validly imposed under State law.” *Id.* at 613.

Because the obligation to pay child support is a legal, statutory obligation, that does not require the agreement of either parent, the court did not err in ordering Father to pay support under FL § 5-203(b)(1). Additionally, as Talbot County correctly notes, child support orders are always subject to modification “upon a showing of a material change of circumstance.” FL § 12-104(a). Father’s request that the judgment be vacated with prejudice is therefore improper.

### III.

#### Denial of Other Filings

Father argues that the court erred in denying his motions to dismiss, demand for personal responsibility contract, judicial notices, and affidavits “without providing any legal basis or applicable law.”<sup>10</sup> He contends that the court’s denial of his filings “without legal basis violates procedural due process.” Father also alleges that the child support

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<sup>10</sup> Father challenges the court’s denial of his motions to dismiss, but with one exception, he does not make specific arguments in this appeal addressing the issues and legal theories he raised in these motions. Father does not address, with particularity, allegations of: (1) improper agency action under the Administrative Procedure Act, (2) violations of the Fifth Amendment, (3) violations of repayment obligations under 45 C.F.R. § 302.33, (4) violations of separation of powers, (5) lack of jurisdiction, (6) the use of bank levy and social security bonds; and (7) the misrepresentation of IV-D agencies as courts and related due process violations. Accordingly, we will not address these issues. *See Konover Prop. Tr. v. WHE Assocs.*, 142 Md. App. 476, 494 (2002) (“It is not this Court’s responsibility to attempt to fashion coherent legal theories to support [Father’s] sweeping claims.”). We have addressed the single issue from Father’s motion to dismiss that he did raise in this appeal, the alleged requirement of a voluntary contract to justify child support, and, as indicated, we conclude that it has no merit.

enforcement action violated federal and constitutional law, and that the court engaged in judicial misconduct and breached its judicial duty.

Talbot County contends that the court properly acted within its discretion to deny Father’s various outstanding filings. It asserts that Father’s filings did not comply with the Maryland Rules and were largely based on the “sovereign citizen” or “redemptionist” theory, which this Court has rejected. Talbot County also argues that Father “failed to establish that his constitutional rights were violated,” and his “remaining claims were not before the equity court and are not legally cognizable.”

**A.**

**Court’s Grounds for Denial**

We begin with Father’s argument that the court denied his filings without legal basis. The majority of the outstanding filings listed in the court’s July 30, 2024 order were based on Father’s belief that the court lacked authority over him. His filings referenced doctrines of the “redemptionist theory,” which reasons that:

a person has a split personality: a real person and a fictional person called the “strawman.” The “strawman” purportedly came into being when the United States went off the gold standard in 1933, and, instead, pledged the strawman of its citizens as collateral for the country’s national debt. Redemptionists claim that [the] government has power only over the strawman and not over the live person, who remains free. Individuals can free themselves by filing UCC financing statements, thereby acquiring an interest in their strawman. Thereafter, the real person can demand that government officials pay enormous sums of money to use the strawman’s name.

*Anderson v. O’Sullivan*, 224 Md. App. 501, 509 (2015). Individuals who subscribe to this theory often write in all capital letters, as Father did in several of his filings, including the

affidavit in support of his amended appellant brief, to distinguish between the live person and the fictional strawman, reasoning that “when your name is written in all capital letters, IT IS NOT YOUR NAME!” *Id.* at 510.<sup>11</sup> (internal quotations and citation omitted). We have held that “[t]hese contentions have not, will not, and cannot be accepted as valid.” *Id.* at 512.

Many of Father’s filings are rooted in this meritless conspiracy theory. In Father’s May 24, 2024 filing, he stated: “As director and beneficiary of my LEGAL PERSON/corporation. You have 21 days to respond . . . and provide proof of CLAIM as to your LEGAL or lawful authority.” Father then filed a notice of “Special Appearance” reserving the right to contest jurisdiction over him. Father’s June 26, 2024 affidavit stated that he was “a free man in the flesh, not a legal entity or corporation, and not subject to codes, statues, or regulations.” In the July 8, 2024 correspondence filed, Father listed his name in all caps and stated that he did “not consent or waive any of [his] rights to freedom and liberty as a flesh and blood man as God gave [him] the power to handle [his] own affairs.” Under the signature line was “UCC 1-308,” which appeared to reference the UCC filing process redemptionist theorists allege can be used to “acquir[e] an interest in their strawman.” *Anderson*, 224 Md. App. at 509. Father’s request for recusal of the judge, his request for clarification of the order denying his motion to dismiss, and his

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<sup>11</sup> Father states in his affidavit that: “I am the Respondent in the aforementioned case and a living Man, distinct from the LEGAL NAME ‘JAHARI DEMON COPPER.’ I appear specially, under duress, to assert my rights and preserve them in accordance with UCC 1-308.”

complaint against the court, which challenged the court’s authority over him, are also signed by Father “WITHOUT PREJUDICE UCC 1-308.”

In addition, the majority of the filings subject to the July 30, 2024 order did not comport with requirements of the Maryland Rules governing motions. Maryland Rule 2-311(c) provides that a written motion “shall state with particularity the grounds and the authorities in support of each ground.” In his June 7, 2024 “Request for Judicial Notice,” Father requested that the court take judicial notice of various documents, but he did not state with particularity how they apply to the child support enforcement action against him. His Notice of Demand for Personal Responsibility Contract demanded that the court provide documents and responses to 13 interrogatories, without providing any legal authority to support his request or the court’s obligation to respond.

In denying the relief that Father sought in the nine filings listed in the order, the court did provide an explanation. It stated: “Underlying all these filings seems to be [Father’s] belief that he is a ‘free man, not subject to the commercial regulations and statutory obligations improperly applied to natural persons.’” The court stated that Father’s arguments were not “compelling,” and it denied Father’s outstanding filings to the extent that they sought any relief. Additionally, as Talbot County notes, even if the court did not provide an explanation for its ruling, courts are not required to elaborate on the reasons for denying a motion because they are presumed to “know the law and to apply it properly.” *State v. Chaney*, 375 Md. 168, 174 (2003) (quoting *Ball v. State*, 347 Md. 156, 206 (1997)). As discussed further below, Father has not rebutted the presumption

that the court was correct in denying his outstanding filings. *Selective Way Ins. Co. v. Fireman’s Fund Ins. Co.*, 257 Md. App. 1, 55 (2023) (“[T]he most fundamental principle of appellate review [ ] is that the action of a trial court is presumed to have been correct and the burden of rebutting that presumption is on the party claiming error to persuade us that [an] error occurred.”) (quoting *White v. Pines Cmty. Improvement Ass’n*, 173 Md. App. 13, 50 (2007)).

**B.**

**Father’s Alleged Statutory and Constitutional Violations are Without Merit**

Father presents 15 issues for review in this appeal, 10 of which allege either federal statutory or constitutional violations, and all of which lack meaningful argument. To be addressed by this Court, “a party’s appellate brief must include ‘[a]rgument in support of the party’s position on each issue.’” *Id.* at 55-56 (quoting Md. Rule 8-504(a)(6)). We are not required to “seek out law to sustain [an appellant’s] position,” or “address an issue where a party provides only conclusory statements without sufficient factual or legal support.” *Id.* at 56 (quoting *Rollins v. Capital Plaza Assocs.*, 181 Md. App. 188, 202 (2008)). With this in mind, we will discuss the remaining issues Father presented in his brief.

Father argues that the court’s refusal to respond to his certified mail request for a Personal Responsibility Contract and garnishment contract violated his procedural due process rights under the Fourteenth Amendment and 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Father provides no authority, however, for his position that the court must respond to requests for

documentary evidence from parties. Courts do not provide potential evidence to parties; rather, courts determine what evidence is admissible. *See* Md. Rule 5-104(a) (courts determine admissibility of evidence). It is the burden of the party who asserts the affirmative of an issue to produce sufficient evidence. *See Bd. of Trs., Cmty. Coll. of Balt. Cnty. v. Patient First Corp.*, 444 Md. 452, 469 (2015). Moreover, as we noted, *supra*, a contract agreeing to pay child support is not required for a court to order a parent to meet his or her obligation to pay child support.

With regard to his Fourteenth Amendment claim, Father has not identified, with specificity, any procedural due process right the court violated. Because Father cannot show a violation of federal law, he has no claim under Section 1983. *Thomas v. Gladstone*, 386 Md. 693, 700 (2005) (Section 1983 provides cause of action for violations of Federal law under color of State law). Even if he did, Section 1983 provides for a federal cause of action, and is not a proper defense in a State child support enforcement action. *Id.*

Father's Fourth Amendment argument also fails. He asserts that Talbot County's "enforcement of fraudulent child support orders in complete disregard of evidence" violates 42 U.S.C. §§ 1983, 1985, and the Fourth Amendment. Father does not specify how Talbot County's child support enforcement actions in this case violated his Fourth Amendment rights, and he does not provide any legal theory for his conclusory allegations. Nonetheless, a person does not have a reasonable expectation of privacy in public records, credit records, and certain financial documents accessed to enforce child support obligations. *See Jones v. Buckner*, 963 F.Supp.2d 1267, 1277 (N.D. Ala. 2013) (search of

public crime records and credit records to secure compliance with child support order did not violate Fourth Amendment). Moreover, as indicated, any claims under 42 U.S.C. §§ 1983 and 1985 must be brought in a separate cause of action and are not proper defenses in this matter. *Jackson v. City of Cleveland*, 925 F.3d 793, 817 (6th Cir. 2019) (Section 1985 creates cause of action for conspiracy to deprive another of equal protection of the laws, obstruction of justice, and witness intimidation), *cert. denied*, 140 S.Ct. 855 (2020); *Wilder v. Va. Hosp. Ass'n*, 496 U.S. 498, 508 (1990).

Father also cites to 42 U.S.C. § 666(a), the Public Health and Welfare title, but he does not discuss any particular provision of this voluminous subsection to support his argument that a signed contractual agreement is required here. Regardless, 42 U.S.C. § 666(a) requires states to implement procedures to increase the effectiveness of their child support enforcement program. It does not require a signed contractual agreement by a parent to enforce a child support order.<sup>12</sup> *See* 42 U.S.C. § 666(a).

Father raises several claims regarding judicial misconduct. He asserts that the court's "blanket denial" of his filings "constitutes judicial misconduct and a constructive denial of due process under 28 U.S.C. § 455." Father also contends that the judge had a disqualifying conflict of interest, and the judge breached his judicial duty in refusing to address Father's "affidavits and filings." Father's contentions have no basis in law or fact. To start, 28 U.S.C. § 455, which addresses when a judge shall recuse from a proceeding,

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<sup>12</sup> 45 C.F.R. § 303.101, which requires states to implement expedited processes "to establish paternity and to establish, modify, and enforce support orders," is also inapplicable here.

is not applicable to state court judges. *United States v. Int'l Bhd. of Teamsters*, 931 F.Supp. 1074, 1102 (S.D.N.Y. 1996) (“As the statutory language makes clear, this provision applies solely to members of the federal judiciary.”), *aff'd*, 120 F.3d 341 (2d Cir. 1997). In any event, Father does not cite specific grounds in support of his assertion that the judge had a conflict of interest or engaged in judicial misconduct. Additionally, Father’s contention that the court’s refusal to address filings warrants punitive damages is not a legally actionable claim under the doctrine of judicial immunity. *State v. Rovin*, 472 Md. 317, 343-44 (2021) (judicial immunity is a form of absolute immunity designed to promote the independence of the courts without fear of lawsuit from disgruntled litigants).

Father alleges that “Title IV-D creates perverse incentives for courts and officers to financially benefit from fraudulent child support orders” in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause. As Talbot County correctly notes, however, Father does not identify a particular characteristic forming the basis for disparate treatment, or how the courts financially benefit from child support orders. *Doe v. Dep’t of Pub. Safety & Corr. Servs.*, 185 Md. App. 625, 636 (2009) (equal protection requires the government to justify decisions which treat people differently based on a particular characteristic). Because this argument is devoid of any legal or factual support, we will not address it further.

Father also contends that child support enforcement procedures “amount to involuntary servitude” in violation of the Thirteenth Amendment. This argument, however, has been squarely rejected by courts. *See Child Support Enf’t Agency v. Doe*,

125 P.3d 461, 472 (D. Haw. 2005) (compiling cases holding that child support enforcement mechanisms do not run afoul of the Thirteenth Amendment). *Accord United States v. Ballek*, 170 F.3d 871, 874 (9th Cir. 1999) (enforcement of child support is constitutionally permissible).

Father’s final contention is that the copyright infringement of his legal name without permission constitutes a violation of his intellectual property rights.<sup>13</sup> This argument does not appear to have been raised below and therefore is not preserved. Md. Rule 8-131(a) (“Ordinarily, an appellate court will not decide any other issue unless it plainly appears by the record to have been raised in or decided by the trial court.”). Even if it were raised below, Father has not presented any facts, authority, or argument in support of his claim. In any event, Father’s assertion appears to be rooted in his belief in the redemptionist theory and disregards well-established law providing that names are generally not subject to copyright or trademarks. *See* 37 C.F.R. § 202.1(a) (personal names not subject to copyright). *Accord Abraham Zion Corp. v. Lebow*, 761 F.2d 93, 104 (2d Cir. 1985) (personal names protected as trademarks “only if, through usage, they have acquired distinctiveness and secondary meaning”).

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<sup>13</sup> Father’s argument that the court violated state transparency laws in failing to respond to his Maryland Public Information Act (“MPIA”) request is not before us. The court’s July 30, 2024 order expressly states that it is not addressing Father’s MPIA request, dated July 22, 2024. Nevertheless, as Talbot County notes, to obtain information under the MPIA, Father must initiate a request pursuant to the Public Information Act. Md. Code. Ann., Gen. Provisions § 4-202(a) (2019 Repl. Vol.).

For the reasons stated, the circuit court did not err or abuse its discretion in denying the relief sought in Father's outstanding filings.

**JUDGMENT OF THE CIRCUIT COURT  
FOR TALBOT COUNTY AFFIRMED.  
COSTS TO BE PAID BY APPELLANT.**