

UNREPORTED*

IN THE APPELLATE COURT

OF MARYLAND

No. 2319

September Term, 2024

JULIE A. GASKINS

v.

EASYKNOCK, INC. d/b/a EK REALTY, et al

Arthur,
Ripken,
Hotten, Michele D.,
(Senior Judge, Specially Assigned),

JJ.

Opinion by Ripken, J.

Filed: March 3, 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 its persuasive value only if the citation conforms to Rule 1-104(a)(2)(B).

In August of 2024, Julie Gaskins (“Gaskins”) filed a complaint in the Circuit Court for Baltimore City, seeking quiet title relating to a property that belonged to her father, Andrew S. Gaskins, who passed away. The defendants—EasyKnock Inc. and EK Real Estate Fund I, LLC (collectively, “EasyKnock”)—moved to dismiss the complaint, asserting that Gaskins had failed to allege facts sufficient to show entitlement to relief under the asserted claim for quiet title. Gaskins filed an opposition to the motion to dismiss; however, rather than addressing whether she had plausibly pled the elements to quiet title, Gaskins instead contended that she was entitled to relief based on various fraud-related assertions. The circuit court granted the motion to dismiss, ruling that the allegations contained in the complaint did not demonstrate that Gaskins could establish a legal right to possession of the property. Gaskins filed this timely appeal, which presents the following issue for our review:¹

Whether the circuit court erred in granting the motion to dismiss.

For the reasons to follow, we shall affirm the judgment of the circuit court.

FACTUAL AND PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND

According to Gaskins’ complaint to quiet title, the property subject to the complaint was acquired by Gaskins’ father, Andrew Gaskins, in 1981. The acquisition was

¹ Rephrased from:

1. Did the trial [c]ourt err in granting the [m]otion to [d]ismiss in violation of the Maryland Code, Corporations and Associations [Article], §4A-919? The attorneys alleging representation fraudulently filed the motion for a company that officially closed eight days before the [m]otion to [d]ismiss was filed, as documented by the letter from the United States Senate to the former CEO Jarred Kessler, dated December 17, 2024.

accomplished by procurement of the deed to the property. The events that occurred after Mr. Gaskins passed away are the primary focus of Gaskins' complaint.

Gaskins alleged that the EasyKnock defendants "fraudulently" obtained the property in August of 2021, and that EasyKnock recorded a deed to the property in February of 2022. According to Gaskins, EasyKnock made false statements on a HUD-1 statement. She asserted that although EasyKnock had listed a price on the HUD-1 representing the payment price for the property, EasyKnock had not paid that price. She also asserted that she and her father had maintained "exclusive, complete, actual, open, notorious, hostile, and exclusive possession" of the property in a manner "adverse to" EasyKnock for more than forty years. Gaskins claimed that EasyKnock's "fraudulent actions" had created "irreparable harm" to her.² Gaskins did not assert that she owned the property or that she had held title to the property at any time.

EasyKnock moved to dismiss the complaint. The defendants asserted that Gaskins had failed to plead the requisite elements of a claim for a quiet title action. EasyKnock asserted that to state a claim to quiet title, a plaintiff must be able to assert ownership of the property, either by color of title or by claim of right through adverse possession. EasyKnock contended that Gaskins had failed at the pleading stage to plausibly allege

² From our reading of Gaskins' complaint, she asserted that a variety of EasyKnock's conduct constituted fraud. Among these assertions, Gaskins claimed that EasyKnock needed licenses to act as a mortgage broker, mortgage originator, or a landlord, and did not have any of these licenses; that the notaries to the deed were required to either be title insurance producers or be appointed by one of the title companies, and that none of the notaries met these qualifications; and that EasyKnock was being investigated for "fraudulent and deceptive practices" in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Michigan.

either method of ownership, as she did not allege that she held legal title to the property, and that her assertion that her father’s ownership of the property was adverse was not plausible given that his ownership had been established through title.

EasyKnock attached as exhibits to its motion several documents referenced in Gaskins’ complaint. Included was a deed of trust associated with the HUD-1 statement, through which Gaskins, signing as executor of her father’s estate as well as a purported trust, took out a mortgage against the property. Also included with the documents attached to the motion to dismiss was a deed that Gaskins signed in her role as personal representative of her father’s estate, through which she conveyed the property to EasyKnock. EasyKnock also attached to the motion as an exhibit an order from the orphan’s court that removed Gaskins as personal representative of her father’s estate.

Gaskins opposed the motion to dismiss. She identified recent statutory additions—which criminalized the knowing recordation of instruments containing false information³ and which allowed for recovery of costs and attorney’s fees in quiet title actions when a claim or defense is related to such⁴—as a basis to sustain her complaint. Gaskins then claimed that EasyKnock had committed fraud with respect to the HUD-1 statement; that it

³ See Md. Code Ann., (1974, 2023 Repl. Vol., 2025 Supp.) § 3-104.2 of the Real Property Article (“RP”) (prohibiting recordation of “a deed or other instrument that the person knows contains false information, including information related to the ownership of the property” and stating that “[a] person who violates this section is guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction is subject to a fine not exceeding \$500[.]”).

⁴ See RP § 14-617 (c) (noting that “a court may award to either party costs and reasonable attorney’s fees if a claim or defense in the case is related to an alleged violation of” RP § 3-104.2).

had violated various real estate licensing regulations and statutes; and that it had engaged in an “equity-skimming” as well as that its business model was a Ponzi scheme. Gaskins did not respond to EasyKnock’s assertion that she had failed to state a claim for an action to quiet title.

The circuit court subsequently ruled on the motion to dismiss. The court observed that when considering a motion to dismiss, it was generally limited to the four corners of the complaint; however, citing *Margolis v. Sandy Spring Bank*, 221 Md. App. 703 (2015), the court noted that “consideration of uncontroverted matters that merely supplement the allegations in the complaint will not convert a motion to dismiss to one for summary judgment.” The court held that Gaskins’ complaint failed to demonstrate that she was entitled to the remedy of quiet title, as she failed to allege that she had a legal right to possession of the property. The court further took judicial notice of the orphan’s court proceedings which had removed Gaskins as personal representative of her father’s estate. The court dismissed Gaskins’ complaint. Gaskins filed this timely appeal.

DISCUSSION

THE CIRCUIT COURT DID NOT ERR IN GRANTING THE MOTION TO DISMISS.

A. Party Arguments

Gaskins does not identify an error in the circuit court’s decision to dismiss her complaint. Instead, she makes a series of assertions regarding fraud. Gaskins claims that EasyKnock committed fraud with respect to the HUD-1 statement; that its filing of a motion to dismiss was fraudulent because the company was closed at the time the motion was filed; and that EasyKnock was being investigated by attorneys general in two states

related to its business model and absence of requisite licensing. Gaskins also contends without analysis that recent statutory additions allow award of costs and attorney’s fees in an action to quiet title if part of the claim is based on knowing recordation of an instrument that contains false information.⁵ Gaskins does not address the circuit court’s ruling that she failed to state a claim for an action to quiet title.

EasyKnock asserts that Gaskins’ complaint failed to state a claim for relief under the quiet title statute because she failed to plead that she was entitled to an ownership interest in the property. EasyKnock notes that Gaskins’ appellate brief fails to address ownership of the property.

B. Standard of Review

The appellate standard of review of the grant of a motion to dismiss is whether the trial court was legally correct. *Schisler v. State*, 177 Md. App. 731, 742 (2007) (citation omitted); *see also Eastland Food Corp. v. Mekhaya*, 486 Md. 1, 20 (2023) (noting that a court’s grant of a motion to dismiss for failure to state a claim is a question of law that appellate courts review without deference). In considering whether to dismiss a complaint under Maryland Rule 2-322(b), a court must read the complaint in the light most favorable

⁵ Gaskins also presented argument related to circumstances where piercing the corporate veil is appropriate to prevent fraud or inequity. As this Court has noted, “[p]iercing the corporate veil is a tool that allows courts to disregard the corporate form and hold shareholders individually liable under certain circumstances.” *Qun Lin v. Cruz*, 247 Md. App. 606, 639 (2020) (citation omitted). The question of whether to hold shareholders of a business individually liable in place of the business is unrelated to whether Gaskins adequately stated a claim for quiet title. In addition, this argument was not presented to the trial court and is not preserved for appellate review. *See* Md. Rule 8-131(a). We therefore decline to address the issue.

to the plaintiff, accepting as true the well-pleaded facts and reasonable inferences drawn from such facts. *Mekhaya*, 486 Md. at 20 (citing *RRC Ne., LLC v. BAA Md., Inc.*, 413 Md. 638, 643 (2010)). The dismissal of the complaint is appropriate “only if the allegations and permissible inferences drawn therefrom fail to state a cause of action.” *Id.* (citing *RRC Ne.*, 413 Md. at 643). “Consideration of the universe of facts pertinent to the court’s analysis of the motion [is] limited generally to the four corners of the complaint and its incorporated supporting exhibits[.]” *State Ctr., LLC v. Lexington Charles Ltd. P’ship*, 438 Md. 451, 497 (2014) (internal quotation marks omitted) (quoting *RRC Ne.*, 413 Md. at 643). Where a document outside the allegations in the complaint merely supplements the complaint’s allegations, and the document is not controverted, “consideration of the document does not convert the motion into one for summary judgment.” *Advance Telecom Process LLC v. DSFederal, Inc.*, 224 Md. App. 164, 175 (2015).

C. Analysis

“The purpose of a quiet title action is to ‘protect the owner of legal title from being disturbed in his possession and from being harassed by suits in regard to his title by persons setting up unjust and illegal pretensions.’” *Wilkinson v. Bd. of Cnty. Comm’rs of St. Mary’s Cnty.*, 255 Md. App. 213, 259 (2022) (quoting *Porter v. Schaffer*, 126 Md. App. 237, 260 (1999)) (further citation and quotation marks omitted). The elements of a complaint to quiet title are contained in section 14-108(a) of the Real Property Article of the Maryland Code (1974, 2023 Repl. Vol.) (“RP”), which states:

Any person in actual peaceable possession of property, or, if the property is vacant and unoccupied, in constructive and peaceable possession of it, *either under color of title or claim of right by reason of the person or the person’s*

predecessor's adverse possession for the statutory period, when the person's title to the property is denied or disputed, or when any other person claims, of record or otherwise to own the property, or any part of it, or to hold any lien encumbrance on it, regardless of whether or not the hostile outstanding claim is being actively asserted, and if an action at law or proceeding in equity is not pending to enforce or test the validity of the title, lien, encumbrance, or other adverse claim, the person may maintain a suit in accordance with Subtitle 6 of this title in the circuit court for the county where the property or any part of the property is located to quiet or remove any cloud from the title, or determine any adverse claim.

(Emphasis added).

This Court has previously clarified the meanings of “color of title” and “claim of right.” *Yourik v. Mallonee*, 174 Md. App. 415, 427–28 (2007). We have explained that reference in the statute to “color of title” is meant to describe an assertion of ownership based on a defective paper title; in other words, color of title means “that the occupancy rests on an instrument purporting to convey an interest in the property, although the instrument is not valid for that purpose, either because the instrument is not effective or because it does not convey title to the disputed property.” *Id.* (citing *Gore v. Hall*, 206 Md. 485, 490–91 (1955)). We further explained that a claim of title arising from a “claim of right” refers to an intention to assert ownership over property “and claim it against the title holder and the world” without an assertion of paper title; in other words, claim of right “mean[s] that the occupancy rests on the claimant’s demonstrated ‘intention to appropriate and hold the land as owner, and to the exclusion, rightfully or wrongfully, of every[]one else.’” *Id.* at 428 (quoting *Guar. Title & Trust Corp. v. United States*, 264 U.S. 200, 204–04 (1924)).

The plaintiff in a quiet title action bears the burden of “establishing both possession and legal title by clear proof.” *Wilkinson*, 255 Md. App. at 259 (quoting *Porter*, 126 Md. at 260) (internal quotation marks and further citation omitted). RP section 14-606 also requires that a complaint to quiet title include “[t]he title of the plaintiff as to which a determination is sought and the basis of the title;” and, if the plaintiff’s title is based on adverse possession, “the specific facts constituting the adverse possession[.]”

Here, with respect to title of the property, Gaskins alleged that her father had held title to the property—which he acquired by deed and right of survivorship—since 1981. She asserted that her father passed away in April of 2020. She also alleged that EasyKnock “obtained” the property in August of 2021 and that it subsequently filed a deed in the Land Records for Baltimore City. These allegations were supplemented with a copy of the deed, demonstrating that Gaskins, acting as “Personal Representative for the Estate of Andrew S. Gaskins[,]” had conveyed the property to EasyKnock in August of 2021. Gaskins did not allege that she had been conveyed an interest in the property; nor did she allege that she had a right or expectation of a right to legal title.⁶ *See Yourik*, 174 Md. at 427–28.

Gaskins further alleged that her father had “exclusive, complete, actual, notorious, hostile, and continuous possession of the [p]roperty adverse to [EasyKnock] for more than 40 years.” She indicated that this was so because she or her father had paid to maintain the

⁶ The circuit court took judicial notice of the orphan’s court proceedings in which Gaskins had been removed as personal representative of her father’s estate. Gaskins brought this action in her individual capacity, not in a representative role; moreover, she did not allege that her interest in the property stemmed from receiving it through her father’s estate. Also problematic, we note Gaskins did not name her father’s estate as a defendant in this action as a party having adverse claims to Gaskins. *See* RP § 14-608; RP § 14-610.

property for the past 39 years. However, this conclusory allegation⁷ is undermined by Gaskins’ prior assertion that her father had held legal title to the property since 1981; because he held legal title, his claim was not hostile to anyone, much less to EasyKnock, who did not claim an interest in the property until title was conveyed by deed in 2021. *See Yourik*, 174 Md. at 428 (describing claim of right assertions of property ownership as an intent to claim ownership over the property “against the title holder and world”). Moreover, Gaskins did not allege facts to suggest that her occupancy of the property was hostile to anyone.

These allegations, even when taken in a light most favorable to Gaskins, *Mekhaya*, 486 Md. at 20, are insufficient to state a quiet title claim because Gaskins did not allege facts demonstrating either that she asserted color of title or claim of right with respect to the property. *See* RP § 14-108(a); *see Yourik*, 174 Md. App. at 427–28. Because Gaskins failed to state a claim to quiet title, the circuit court was legally correct in dismissing her complaint.

Gaskins’ arguments regarding fraud, investigations by various attorneys general, and additions to the Maryland Code do not impact this analysis. The question of whether Gaskins has adequately stated a claim to quiet title—i.e., whether she has plausibly pled factual assertions demonstrating the elements of quiet title—has no overlap with whether EasyKnock engaged in fraud or whether attorneys general in other states have conducted

⁷ *See Polek v. J.P. Morgan Chase Bank, N.A.*, 424 Md. 333, 350–51 (2012) (citing *RRC Ne.*, 413 Md. at 644) (“The facts in the complaint must be pled with specificity; bald allegations and conclusory statements are not sufficient to support a complaint.”).

investigations into its activities. Those questions are not before us, and we decline Gaskins' invitation to review them.

We turn briefly to Gaskins' reference to statutory additions passed by the General Assembly in 2024. RP section 3-104.2 criminalizes the knowing recordation of instruments containing false information.⁸ RP section 14-617(c) allows for recovery of costs and attorney's fees in quiet title actions when a claim or defense is related to knowing recordation of instruments containing false information.⁹ The additions do not obviate the necessity for a plaintiff plausibly plead factual assertions demonstrating the elements of quiet title.

Because Gaskins failed to plausibly plead a legal right to possession of the property, she failed to state a claim for quiet title, and the circuit court's dismissal of her complaint was legally correct.

**JUDGMENT OF THE CIRCUIT
COURT FOR BALTIMORE CITY
AFFIRMED. COSTS TO BE PAID BY
APPELLANT.**

⁸ See n.3, *supra*.

⁹ See n.4, *supra*.