

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF DELAWARE

ALEX RYLE,	)	
	)	
Plaintiff,	)	
	)	
v.	)	C.A. No. N26M-03-104 SSA
	)	
OFFICER DAVID BEAVER,	)	
DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF	)	
LABOR SECRETARY	)	
LAKRESHA MOULTRIE,	)	
	)	
Defendants.	)	

Submitted: August 4, 2026
Decided: August 7, 2026

MEMORANDUM OPINION

Alex Ryle filed a *pro se* Petition for Writ of Mandamus,¹ seeking that this Court Order the Department of Labor to assist him in “obtaining [] unpaid wages and liquidated damages.”² Defendants have filed a Motion to Dismiss, and Mr. Ryle responded. To resolve the matter, the Court must determine whether the statute Mr. Ryle invokes excludes the Department of Correction from its definition of “employer.” The Court held oral argument, and the matter is ready for decision.

Factual Background

Mr. Ryle “is incarcerated at the James T. Vaughn Correctional Center in Smyrna, DE and is employed as a clerk at the institution’s Law Library.”³ In

¹ See generally 10 Del. C. § 564.

² Am. Pet. for Writ of Mandamus, D.I. 36, at 7.

³ *Id.* at 1.

October of 2025, he filed an institutional grievance regarding a wage discrepancy. In response, the Department of Correction (“DOC”) engaged in informal resolution by explaining its position, but DOC did not process the grievance.⁴

Mr. Ryle was not satisfied. He next sought assistance from the Department of Labor, seeking to have his “unpaid wage issue investigated....”⁵ The Department of Labor declined. In a letter to Mr. Ryle, Defendant David Beaver explained that “[b]ecause inmates in prison programs are not employees, by definition, we do not have jurisdiction over the pay they receive.”⁶ Mr. Ryle then filed the at-issue Petition, in which he invoked the Wage Payment and Collection Act (the “Act”).⁷

Standards of Review

On a Motion to Dismiss

The standard by which this Court reviews a motion to dismiss filed pursuant to Superior Court Civil Rule 12(b)(6) is well-established. The Court must accept as true all well-pleaded allegations;⁸ however, claims that are “clearly without merit” will be dismissed.⁹ Further, the Court will not “accept conclusory allegations

⁴ See Letter Dated December 17, 2025, D.I. 38, at 2–3. Instead, DOC deemed it to be a request. D.I. 40, Ex. G, at 3.

⁵ D.I. 38, at 6.

⁶ See D.I. 37, Ex. 3.

⁷ D.I. 36, at 2. See generally 19 Del. C. §§ 1101–15.

⁸ *Sterling Network Exch., LLC v. Digit. Phoenix Van Buren, LLC*, 2008 WL 2582920, at *4 (Del. Super.) citing *Lesh v. Appriva*, 2006 WL 2788183, at *3 (Del. Super.).

⁹ *Caldera Properties-Lewes/Rehoboth v. Ridings Dev., LLC*, 2008 WL 3323926, at *11 (Del. Super.) quoting *Wilmington Tr. Co. v. Politzer & Haney, Inc.*, 2003 WL 1989703, at *2 (Del. Super.).

unsupported by specific facts....”¹⁰ A motion to dismiss shall be denied “unless the plaintiff would not be entitled to recover under any reasonably conceivable set of circumstances susceptible of proof.”¹¹ The Court must draw every reasonable factual inference in favor of Plaintiff.¹²

For a Petition for Writ of Mandamus

“A writ of mandamus is an extraordinary remedy that the Superior Court may issue to a state agency or official to compel the performance of a non-discretionary duty to which the petitioner has established a clear legal right.”¹³ “[I]f the right is doubtful, or the duty discretionary, or the power to perform the duty wanting or inadequate, or if there be any other specific and adequate legal remedy, this writ will not, in general, be allowed.”¹⁴

Parties’ Contentions

Defendants point to 19 *Del. C.* § 1101(a) and its definitions of “employee” and “employer” to argue that the Act does not apply to these facts.¹⁵ At oral argument, Defendants relied on the Act’s exclusion of the State from its definition

¹⁰ *Price v. E.I. DuPont de Nemours & Co.*, 26 A.3d 162, 166 (Del. 2011) *rev’d on other grounds by Ramsey v. Ga. S. Univ. Advanced Dev. Ctr.*, 189 A.3d 1255 (Del. 2018).

¹¹ *E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Co. v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 2008 WL 555919, at *1 (Del. Super.) *citing Atamian v. Gorkin*, 1999 WL 743663, at *5 (Del. Super.).

¹² *Cent. Mortg. Co. v. Morgan Stanley Mortg. Cap. Holdings LLC*, 27 A.3d 531, 535 (Del. 2011) *citing Savor, Inc. v. FMR Corp.*, 812 A.2d 894, 896–97 (Del. 2002).

¹³ *Randolph v. State*, 155 A.3d 1284, at *2 (Del. 2017) (citations omitted).

¹⁴ *Darby v. New Castle Gunning Bedford Educ. Ass’n*, 336 A.2d 209, 210 (Del. 1975) *quoting McCoy v. State*, 36 A. 81 (Del. 1897).

¹⁵ Defs.’ Mot. to Dismiss, D.I. 56, at 3–4.

of an employer. Mr. Ryle argues that *Walls v. Department of Correction* and *Eaton v. Coupe* support his position that he is not excluded by the Act.¹⁶ In his written submission, he did not address whether DOC is an “employer” under the Act.

Analysis

19 Del. C. § 1101(a)(5) states as follows:

“Employer” means any individual, partnership, association, joint stock company, trust, corporation, the administrator or executor of the estate of a deceased individual, or the receiver, trustee, or successor of any of the same employing a person. *This chapter does not apply to employees of the United States government, the State of Delaware or any political subdivision of this State.*¹⁷

Consequently, the Court must determine whether the DOC falls outside of the statutory definition of “Employer” under the Act; if it does, the Act does not apply, and Mr. Ryle has not established a clear legal right. This Court has recognized that “[t]he administration of the State prison system falls ‘within the auspices of the Executive branch of our State government.’”¹⁸ The DOC is a state agency and the Act does not apply.

Mr. Ryle’s Petition for Writ of Mandamus asserts he “has exhausted his administrative remedies provided via Delaware Department of Correction’s

¹⁶ Pltf.’s Answ. To Defs.’ Mot. to Dismiss, D.I. 59, at 2. See *Walls v. Dep’t of Corr.*, 663 A.2d 488 (Del. 1995); *Eaton v. Coupe*, 2017 WL 626614 (Del. Super.).

¹⁷ 19 Del. C. § 1101(a)(5) (emphasis added).

¹⁸ *State v. Jerido*, 2024 WL 3887189, at *1 (Del. Super.) quoting *State v. Goodman*, 2010 WL 547394, at *2 (Del. Super.).

grievance system before filing an unpaid wages complaint with the DOL.”¹⁹ He therefore agrees his employer is the DOC—which, as a state agency, falls within the Act’s express carveout. Consequently, even if this Court were to conclude that inmates are statutorily-defined “employees,”²⁰ the Act does not apply to these facts. Mr. Ryle’s request that this Court utilize “an extraordinary remedy” to compel Defendants to “assist [him] in obtaining the unpaid wages and liquidated damages”²¹ is denied because he has not established a clear legal right.

Defendants’ Motion to Dismiss the Petition for Writ of Mandamus is GRANTED.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

/s/Sonia Augusthy
Judge Sonia Augusthy

¹⁹ See D.I. 36, at 6.

²⁰ See generally *Walls*, 663 A.2d 488, at *1 (concluding that, even prior to legislative amendment, the definition of employee under the Minimum Wage Act did not include inmates in a correctional facility); *Eaton*, 2017 WL 626614, at *5 (extending the rationale of *Walls* to the Delaware Whistleblowers’ Protection Act and finding no employer-employee relationship between a correctional institution and an inmate). But see *State v. Barnard*, 637 A.2d 829, at *1 (Del. 1994) (emphasis removed) (“[T]he pivotal factor in determining the ‘employee’ status of an incarcerated individual was the inmate’s ... voluntary decision to perform the work in question for valuable consideration.”).

²¹ D.I. 36, at 7.