

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE NINETEENTH
JUDICIAL CIRCUIT IN AND FOR MARTIN COUNTY, FLORIDA

STEPHEN G. LEIGHTON

CASE NO.

CIVIL DIVISION

v.

MARTIN COUNTY CORRUPTION EXPOSED
an Unincorporated Entity, JOHN DOE and
META PLATFORMS, INC., d/b/a FACEBOOK
Defendants

COMPLAINT FOR PURE BILL OF DISCOVERY

The Plaintiff, STEPHEN G. LEIGHTON, by and through his undersigned counsel, hereby files and serves his Complaint for Pure Bill of Discovery against the Defendants, MARTIN COUNTY CORRUPTION EXPOSED, an Unincorporated Entity, JOHN DOE and META PLATFORMS, INC. d/b/a FACEBOOK, and further states as follows:

JURISDICTIONAL ALLEGATIONS

1. This is an equitable action for Pure Bill of Discovery.
2. At all times material hereto, the Plaintiff, STEPHEN G. LEIGHTON (hereinafter referred to as the Plaintiff, Mr. Leighton or STEVE LEIGHTON) has been a resident of the State of Florida and has been domiciled within the boundaries of Martin County, Florida.
3. At all times material hereto, the Defendant, MARTIN COUNTY CORRUPTION EXPOSED, an Unincorporated Entity (hereinafter referred to as MCCE or by its full name where appropriate) has been an anonymously written and administered page on the Facebook website and/or app.
4. At all times material hereto, the Defendant, JOHN DOE, has been an individual who has both administered and generated content for the Facebook page known as MARTIN COUNTY CORRUPTION EXPOSED. At present, the identify of JOHN DOE is unknown, however, these pleadings will be amended once his or her name is learned through the discovery process.
5. At all times material hereto, META PLATFORMS INC. d/b/a/ FACEBOOK (hereinafter referred to as META, FACEBOOK or by its full name where appropriate) has been a foreign for-profit

corporation whose primary place of business is located in the State of California. Despite the fact that META maintains its corporate offices in the State of California, it conducts business and provides services throughout the United States and abroad, and specifically within the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit.

6. The subject matter of the Facebook posts and content generated by JOHN DOE and MCCE concern individuals within the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit and are specifically intended to reach viewers within the boundaries of Martin County.

7. Therefore, jurisdiction and venue are appropriate within the Circuit Court of the Nineteenth Judicial Circuit in and for Martin County, Florida.

GENERAL ALLEGATIONS

The Plaintiff hereby re-alleges and incorporates paragraphs 1-7 above as though they were fully set forth herein, and further states as follows:

8. The Plaintiff, STEVE LEIGHTON, is an individual who resides and works in Martin County, Florida.

9. Mr. Leighton is a private citizen and has not taken on the role of a public official and/or public figure.

10. On several occasions in 2022 and 2023, an anonymous individual, JOHN DOE, generated posts on the Facebook page known as MARTIN COUNTY CORRUPTION EXPOSED in which he/she claimed that Mr. Leighton participated in corrupt practices as a result of contributions allegedly made by he or his family to Sheriff William Snyder, alleging impropriety by naming Mr. Leighton in relation to Mr. Leighton's ex-wife Kellie Glass Leighton's alleged work for Toby Overdorf and other political comments meant to shame and embarrass Mr. Leighton publicly.

11. The posts are clearly made in an attempt to paint Mr. Leighton and his family in a false light such that readers are led to believe that he has engaged in corruption over a period of multiple years.

12. The allegation and insinuation that Mr. Leighton or his family has bribed Sheriff Snyder, engaged in corruption of any sort or otherwise acted in a legal or morally improper manner is both fallacious and demonstrably inaccurate.

13. In fact, the vast majority of the posts generated by JOHN DOE through the MARTIN COUNTY CORRUPTION EXPOSED Facebook page contain nothing more than conclusory allegations of purported misconduct by a wide variety of private individuals and public officials meant to paint each in the false light of corruption. Each of these posts contain misleading, and actionable, statements that are meant to damage the targets of the author's insinuations with defamation by implication in a misguided attempt to persuade the public that their respective dealings are bad for the community. Therefore, it is apparent from the content of these posts that the sole intent of the author and facilitator of MARTIN COUNTY CORRUPTION EXPOSED is to advance his or her own interests by defaming the subjects of his posts, including Mr. Leighton, without any regard for the truth.

14. The statements levied against Mr. Leighton give rise to claims for: (a) defamation; (b) defamation per se; and, (c) defamation by implication.

COUNT I - PURE BILL OF DISCOVERY - MCCE

The Plaintiff hereby re-alleges and incorporates paragraphs 1-14 above as though they were fully set forth herein, and further states as follows:

15. The Defendant, MCCE, is an unincorporated entity that operates a Facebook page concerning development, growth and related issues in Martin County, Florida. The majority of that page contains posts by the administrator and/or facilitator of the MCCE in which cherry-picked facts are used to insinuate and/or outright claim that individuals, including Mr. Leighton, have engaged in corruption.

16. Ironically, despite the fact that one of the main criticisms outlined on this Facebook page is the allegation that those who are facilitating development in Martin County operate without transparency; the MCCE page is operated anonymously under the pen name @darkmoneymc. As a result, the Plaintiff is unable to identify the person, or persons, who have leveled libelous statements against him.

17. Therefore, the Plaintiff seeks relief in the form of discovery to obtain facts within the Defendants' possession. Specifically, this Pure Bill of Discovery is sought to obtain the name and address of the specific individual, or individuals, that: (1) created the Facebook page known as Martin County Corruption Exposed; (2) facilitate, administrate and curate the content on the Facebook page known as Martin County Corruption Exposed; (3) generate content on the Facebook page known as Martin County Corruption Exposed; and (4) specifically generated content with regard to the post, or posts, concerning Mr. Leighton.

18. This Pure Bill of Discovery is necessary to identify one or more defendants for a potential claim of defamation based upon the false content of the posts. Furthermore, this information which is in the Defendant's possession will aid the Plaintiff in the prosecution of a claim against the wrongdoer.

19. The Plaintiff has a right to pursue this information in order to:

- a. Identify the person or persons responsible for incident;
- b. Pursue a claim for defamation against the correct wrongdoer(s).

20. The discovery sought in this Pure Bill of Discovery relates directly to the Plaintiff

21. The requested discovery sought through this Pure Bill of Discovery is material and necessary to Plaintiff's claim and any future litigation wherein Plaintiff will seek damages and restitution.

22. The Plaintiff is ready to file once he obtains sufficient information to name the appropriate Defendants.

23. The Plaintiff has no other adequate remedy at law.

WHEREFORE, the Plaintiff respectfully requests that this Court enter an Order granting the Pure Bill of Discovery and further ordering that the Defendants produce the name, address and telephone number of the specific individual or individuals who have facilitated, administered, and

generated content for the Facebook page known as Martin County Corruption Exposed. The Plaintiff additionally requests any other relief that is just, necessary and equitable to achieve these means.

COUNT II - PURE BILL OF DISCOVERY - JOHN DOE

The Plaintiff hereby re-alleges and incorporates paragraphs 1-14 above as though they were fully set forth herein, and further states as follows:

24. The Defendant, JOHN DOE, is an individual that created, facilitates, administers and generates content for a Facebook page concerning development, growth and related issues in Martin County, Florida. The majority of that page contains posts in which JOHN DOE uses cherry-picked facts to insinuate and/or outright claim that individuals, including Mr. Leighton have engaged in corruption.

25. Despite the fact that one of the main criticisms outlined on this Facebook page is the allegation that its targets operate without transparency, the administrator of the MCCE page operates anonymously under the pen name @darkmoneymc. As a result, the Plaintiff is unable to identify JOHN DOE in order to file claims for defamation against him or her.

26. Therefore, the Plaintiff seeks relief in the form of discovery to obtain facts within the Defendants' possession. This Pure Bill of Discovery is sought to obtain the name and address of the specific individual, or individuals, that: (1) created the Facebook page known as Martin County Corruption Exposed; (2) facilitate, administrate and curate the content on the Facebook page known as Martin County Corruption Exposed; (3) generate content on the Facebook page known as Martin County Corruption Exposed; and (4) specifically generated content with regard to the post, or posts, concerning Mr. Leighton.

27. This Pure Bill of Discovery is necessary in order to identify one or more defendants such that any action filed will be based upon good-faith knowledge on the part of the Plaintiff and his counsel. Furthermore, this information which is in the Defendant's possession will aid the Plaintiff in the prosecution of a claim against the wrongdoer.

28. The Plaintiff has a right to the requested discovery because without it Plaintiff is unable to:

- a. Identify the person or persons responsible for the libelous statements;
- b. Pursue a claim for defamation against the correct wrongdoer(s).

29. The discovery sought in this Pure Bill of Discovery relates directly to the Plaintiff

30. The requested discovery sought through this Pure Bill of Discovery is material and necessary to Plaintiff's claim and any future litigation wherein Plaintiff will seek damages and restitution.

31. The Plaintiff is ready to file suit as soon as Defendants provide the information within their custody or control.

32. The Plaintiff has no other adequate remedy at law.

WHEREFORE, the Plaintiff respectfully requests that this Court enter an Order granting the Pure Bill of Discovery and further ordering that the Defendants produce the name, address and telephone number of the specific individual or individuals who have facilitated, administrated and generated content for the Facebook page known as Martin County Corruption Exposed. The Plaintiff additionally requests any other relief to which this Court feels Plaintiff may be entitled to through this petition for Pure Bill of Discovery.

COUNT III - PURE BILL OF DISCOVERY – META PLATFORMS

The Plaintiff hereby re-alleges and incorporates paragraphs 1-14 above as though they were fully set forth herein, and further states as follows:

33. META PLATFORMS, INC., operates a social media company commonly known as Facebook in which it provides a forum for individuals and entities to post content in a public forum.

34. One of the mechanisms to post content on the Facebook site is to create a "Page" which can be used as a vehicle to share content with multiple followers.

35. One of those pages is known as MARTIN COUNTY CORRUPTION EXPOSED and it contains a significant number of posts concerning growth and development issues in Martin County, Florida. This page, which is administered by Defendant JOHN DOE, also contains libelous statements about Mr. Leighton, along with numerous other private individuals and public officials.

36. Although the Plaintiff has no intention of bringing a claim for defamation against META PLATFORMS, INC., and acknowledges that it is largely immune from suit under federal law; the Defendant is in possession of data which will identify, or assist in the identification of, the remaining Defendants.

37. The information sought from META PLATFORMS, LLC includes Basic Subscriber Information (BIS) for the creator and administrator of the Facebook page known as MARTIN COUNTY CORRUPTION EXPOSED. Specifically, this information includes:

- A. User Identification Number
- B. Email addresses provided by users
- C. Date/time stamp of the account creation for MCCE
- D. Most recent log-ins for MCCE
- E. Registered mobile numbers for those associated with MCCE
- F. The ISP (Internet Service Provider) utilized by the individual creating content for MCCE.
- G. Any other information, not protected by federal law, that is reasonable calculated to lead to the identification of the creator, administrator, facilitator and content generator for MCCE.

38. The Plaintiff does not request, and will not seek, from META PLATFORMS any information that is proscribed by the Federal Stored Communications Act or that is otherwise privileged.

39. This Pure Bill of Discovery is necessary in order to identify one or more defendants such that any action filed will be based upon good-faith knowledge on the part of the Plaintiff and his counsel. Furthermore, this information which is in the Defendant's possession will aid the Plaintiff in the prosecution of a claim against the wrongdoer.

40. The Plaintiff has a right to the requested discovery because without it Plaintiff is unable to:

- a. Identify the person or persons responsible for the libelous statements;
- b. Pursue a claim for defamation against the correct wrongdoer(s).

41. The discovery sought in this Pure Bill of Discovery relates directly to the Plaintiff

42. The requested discovery sought through this Pure Bill of Discovery is material and necessary to Plaintiff's claim and any future litigation wherein Plaintiff will seek damages and restitution.

43. The Plaintiff is ready to file suit as soon as the Defendant provides the information within their custody or control.

44. The Plaintiff has no other adequate remedy at law.

WHEREFORE, the Plaintiff respectfully requests that this Court enter an Order granting the Pure Bill of Discovery and further ordering that the Defendant produce the name, address and telephone number of the specific individual or individuals who have facilitated, administrated and generated content for the Facebook page known as Martin County Corruption Exposed as well as any other, non-privileged, information in its possession that is reasonably calculate to lead to the identification of such person(s). The Plaintiff additionally requests any other relief to which this Court feels Plaintiff may be entitled to through this petition for Pure Bill of Discovery.

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