

Motion to Avoid Judicial Liens
11 U.S.C. § 522(f)(1)
O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(o)

In re Mazzuca, Case No. 09-40830-rld7

2/17/2015 RLD

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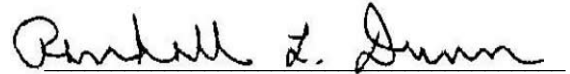
The debtors filed their chapter 7 petition on December 29, 2009. In their original schedules, they listed a residence and several rental real properties. The debtors claimed a homestead exemption in their residence but did not claim any exemptions in any of the rental real properties. The debtors also did not list any judicial liens against the rental real properties. After the debtors received their chapter 7 discharge, their chapter 7 case closed.

The debtors moved to reopen their chapter 7 case so that they could file motions to avoid the judicial liens against their residence and their rental real properties. After their chapter 7 case was reopened, they filed amended schedules reasserting their homestead exemption and claiming \$5 exemptions under O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(o) as to each of the rental real properties. However, the debtors did not specify as to whether they claimed the exemptions under the 2009 version of O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(o), the year in which they filed for bankruptcy, or the 2013 version of O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(o), the most current version of the statute, as to the rental real properties.

The debtors filed a total of eight motions to avoid judicial liens under 11 U.S.C. § 522(f)(1) ("Lien Avoidance Motions"). They filed one motion to avoid the judicial lien of Wells Fargo Bank, N.A. ("Wells Fargo") against their residence ("Residence Lien Avoidance Motion"). They filed the remaining seven motions to avoid the judicial liens of Wells Fargo and Golf Savings Bank ("Golf Savings") against their rental real properties ("Rental Property Lien Avoidance Motions").

Following a hearing on January 20, 2015, the Court granted the debtors' Residence Lien Avoidance Motion. However, it denied the Rental Property Lien Avoidance Motions with prejudice on the ground that the 2009 version of O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(o), as written, applied to personal property only. The Court further determined that, although inapplicable, the 2013 version of O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(o), i.e., O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(p), did not allow the debtors to claim an exemption in the rental real properties because the 2013 version of Oregon's "wild card" exemption did not expand its exemption coverage.

Below is an Order of the Court.



RANDALL L. DUNN
U.S. Bankruptcy Judge

FOR PUBLICATION

UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT

FOR THE DISTRICT OF OREGON

In Re:)	Bankruptcy Case
)	No. 09-40830-rld7
JOHN SCOTT AND JACQUELINE RUTH)	
MAZZUCA,)	
)	
Debtors.)	MEMORANDUM OPINION

On December 15, 2014, the debtors, John Scott and Jacqueline Mazzuca (collectively, "the Mazzucas"), filed a total of eight motions to avoid judicial liens pursuant to 11 U.S.C. § 522(f) (collectively, "Lien Avoidance Motions").¹ The Mazzucas filed one motion to avoid the judicial lien of Wells Fargo Bank, N.A. ("Wells Fargo") against their residence located at 10671 SW Clear St., Tualatin, OR ("Residence Lien Avoidance Motion") (docket #70). The Mazzucas filed the remaining seven motions to avoid liens (docket #69, #71, #72, #73, #74, #75 and #76)

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all chapter and section references are to the federal Bankruptcy Code, 11 U.S.C. §§ 101-1532; all "Rule" references are to the Federal Rules of Bankruptcy Procedure, Rules 1001-9037. The Federal Rules of Civil Procedure are referred to as "Civil Rules."

1 against rental real properties (collectively, "Rental Property Lien
2 Avoidance Motions") located in Sherwood, OR, Tigard, OR, Milwaukie, OR
3 and/or Tualatin, OR. Of these seven motions, one motion was to avoid the
4 judicial lien of Golf Savings Bank ("Golf Savings"),² and the remaining
5 six motions were to avoid judicial liens of Wells Fargo.

6 On January 20, 2015, I held a hearing on the Lien Avoidance
7 Motions. Following the hearing, I again reviewed the Lien Avoidance
8 Motions and all supporting documents. I also have taken judicial notice
9 of all relevant entries on the docket of the Mazzucas' chapter 7 case for
10 the purpose of ascertaining facts not reasonably in dispute. Federal
11 Rule of Evidence 201; In re Butts, 350 B.R. 12, 14 n.1 (Bankr. E.D. Pa.
12 2006). In addition I have reviewed relevant legal authorities.

13 Based on that consideration and review, I will grant the
14 Residence Lien Avoidance Motion but deny the Rental Property Lien
15 Avoidance Motions with prejudice for the reasons stated on the record at
16 the hearing and in this Memorandum Opinion. Following are my findings of
17 fact and conclusions of law under Civil Rule 52(a), applicable with
18 respect to this contested matter under Rules 7052 and 9014.

19
20 I. Relevant Facts

21 The Mazzucas filed their chapter 7 bankruptcy petition on
22 December 29, 2009. They filed their schedules and statement of financial
23

24
25 ² According to the Mazzucas, Golf Savings merged with Sterling
26 Savings Bank on August 2, 2010. See docket #69 and #76. Sterling
Savings Bank merged with Umpqua Bank on April 18, 2014. See id.

1 affairs on January 12, 2010 (docket #13). In their Schedule A and
 2 Schedule D, the Mazzucas listed their residence with a fair market value
 3 ("FMV") of \$535,000. They listed two secured claims against their
 4 residence, one held by Bank of America ("BOA") in the amount of \$463,000,
 5 and the other held by Chase Bank ("Chase") in the amount of \$150,000. In
 6 their original Schedule C, the Mazzucas claimed a \$50,000 exemption in
 7 their residence under O.R.S. §§ 18.395 and 18.402 ("homestead
 8 exemption").

9 The Mazzucas also listed in their Schedule A and Schedule D the
 10 following rental real properties:³

Address	FMV	Secured claim(s)
5225 SE Hill Road, Milwaukie, OR	\$230,000	1) BOA: \$211,000 2) GMAC Mortgage: \$25,106 3) Clackamas County Tax Assessor: \$5,781
15760 SW Division St., Sherwood, OR	\$520,000	1) BOA: \$395,722 2) BOA: \$51,900 3) Thomas Jacobs: \$107,800 4) Washington County Tax Assessor: \$6,857
14260 SW 164th Ave., Tigard, OR	\$325,000	1) EMC Mortgage: \$327,950 2) EMC Mortgage: \$81,929
16157 SW 3rd St., Sherwood, OR	\$430,000	EMC Mortgage: \$503,987

19
 20 ³ In their Schedule A and the original and amended Schedule C, the
 21 Mazzucas describe one rental real property as "one-half of Tract 34 (land
 22 in Clackamas County)." They later state the address for this rental real
 23 property as 6195 SE Jennings Ave., Milwaukie, OR, in their lien avoidance
 motion (docket #76). The Mazzucas did not explain in their motion that
 this address belonged to the "one-half of Tract 34 (land in Clackamas
 County)."

24 Upon my initial review of the lien avoidance motion concerning this
 25 particular rental real property, I was under the impression that the
 26 Mazzucas had not included this rental real property in their original and
 amended schedules. Counsel for the Mazzucas explained the discrepancy in
 his subsequently filed letter dated January 20, 2015.

14050 SW 164th Ave., Tigard, OR	\$325,000	1) Wachovia: \$345,000 2) Washington County Tax Assessor: \$6,708
9295 SW Klamath Ct., Tualatin, OR	\$225,000	1) BOA: \$185,000 2) E-Trade: \$81,700 3) Washington County Tax Assessor: \$3,506
½ of Tract 34 (land in Clackamas County)	\$200,000	Golf Savings: \$275,782

They did not claim any exemptions in any of the rental real properties in their original Schedule C.⁴ The Mazzucas also did not list any judicial liens against any of the rental real properties in their Schedule D. They did not list Golf Savings in either their original Schedule F or their amended Schedule F (docket #32), though they did list Wells Fargo with several general unsecured claims in their original Schedule F (docket #13).

The Mazzucas received their discharge on April 20, 2010. Their chapter 7 case closed on April 15, 2011.

On December 1, 2014, the Mazzucas filed a motion to reopen their chapter 7 case ("Motion to Reopen") (docket #62) so that they could file the Lien Avoidance Motions. Two days later, an order was entered (docket #66) granting their Motion to Reopen.

On December 9, 2014, the Mazzucas filed an amended Schedule C (docket #68). In their amended Schedule C, they reasserted their homestead exemption. They also claimed an exemption of \$5 under O.R.S.

⁴ The Mazzucas also listed their residence and their rental real properties in their statement of intent. In their statement of intent, they disclosed their intent to reaffirm the debts on their residence and the rental real properties.

1 § 18.345(1)(o) as to each of the rental real properties. The Mazzucas
2 did not specify as to whether they claimed the exemption under the 2009
3 version of O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(o), the year in which they filed for
4 bankruptcy, or the 2013 version of O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(o), the most
5 current version of the statute.⁵

6 On December 15, 2014, the Mazzucas filed their Lien Avoidance
7 Motions.⁶ They filed a lien avoidance motion as to their residence
8 (docket #70) and a lien avoidance motion as to each of the rental real
9

10 ⁵ The 2009 version of O.R.S. § 18.345 provides, in relevant part:

11 (1) All property . . . of the judgment debtor, shall be
12 liable to an execution, except as provided in this
13 section and in other statutes granting exemptions from
14 execution. The following property . . . shall be
15 exempt from execution:

16 . . .
17 (o) The debtor's interest, not to exceed \$400 in
18 value, in any personal property. However, this
19 exemption may not be used to increase the amount
20 of any other exemptions. (Emphasis added.)

21 The 2013 version of O.R.S. § 18.345 (the most current version)
22 provides, in relevant part:

23 (1) All property . . . of the judgment debtor, shall be
24 liable to an execution, except as provided in this
25 section and in other statutes granting exemptions from
26 execution. The following property . . . shall be
exempt from execution:

. . .
(o) The debtor's right to assets held in, or right
to receive payments under, a medical savings
account or health savings account authorized
under section 220 or 223 of the Internal Revenue
Code [IRC]."

⁶ The Mazzucas did not provide the amounts of the judicial liens of
Wells Fargo and Golf Savings in the Lien Avoidance Motions.

1 properties (docket #69, #71, #72, #73, #74, #75 and #76).

2 In their Residence Lien Avoidance Motion, the Mazzucas asserted
3 that their residence had a FMV of \$535,000. They alleged that there was
4 a total of \$613,000 owed to the senior lienholders, Bank of America
5 (\$463,000) and Chase (\$150,000). Based on the FMV of and the senior
6 liens against their residence, the Mazzucas contended that Wells Fargo's
7 judicial lien impaired their homestead exemption.

8 In all of the Rental Property Lien Avoidance Motions, the
9 Mazzucas provided the FMV of the subject rental real property, as well as
10 the amounts owed to the senior lienholder(s). See supra pp. 3-4. They
11 asserted that the judgment lien(s) against the subject rental real
12 properties impaired the exemptions they claimed under O.R.S. §
13 18.345(1)(o).

14 Given these circumstances, I scheduled and held a hearing on
15 the Lien Avoidance Motions on January 20, 2015. At the outset of the
16 hearing, I advised counsel for the Mazzucas that I would grant the
17 Residence Lien Avoidance Motion on the ground that Wells Fargo's judicial
18 lien impaired their homestead exemption, as there was no equity available
19 in the residence based on its FMV and the amounts owed to the senior
20 lienholders.

21 I informed counsel for the Mazzucas that I would deny the
22 Rental Property Lien Avoidance Motions with prejudice, however. I
23 pointed out that, in their original Schedule C, the Mazzucas had
24 appropriately claimed exemptions under the 2009 version of O.R.S.
25 § 18.345(1)(o) for certain personal property assets (e.g., accounts
26

1 receivable). But I noted that, in their amended Schedule C, the Mazzucas
2 claimed \$5 exemptions in each of the rental real properties under the
3 same statute, O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(o). I pointed out that the exemption
4 under either the 2009 or the 2013 versions of O.R.S.
5 § 18.345(1)(o) was inapplicable to the rental real properties because: 1)
6 the exemption under the 2009 version of O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(o) applied to
7 personal property only; and 2) the exemption under the 2013 version of
8 O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(o) applied to a debtor's rights to assets held in or
9 right to receive payments under a medical savings account or health
10 savings account as authorized under §§ 220 or 223 of the IRC.

11 Counsel for the Mazzucas explained that, in the past, he had
12 used O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(o) to claim exemptions for rental properties. I
13 stressed to him that the 2009 version of O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(o) cannot be
14 used to exempt real property; by its terms, O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(o) can be
15 used to exempt personal property only. I informed counsel for the
16 Mazzucas that I would issue an opinion to clarify this point - that it
17 was not within the language of the 2009 version of O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(o)
18 to apply the exemption to real property.

19 At his request, I gave counsel for the Mazzucas the opportunity
20 to submit a supplemental brief in support of the Rental Property Lien
21 Avoidance Motions. Instead, he submitted a letter on January 20, 2015
22 ("Letter") (docket #79), explaining that he would not file a supplemental
23 brief and that the Mazzucas did not object to an order denying their
24 Rental Property Lien Avoidance Motions. Counsel for the Mazzucas
25 moreover admitted that he had used "what [was] clearly a personal
26

1 property exemption, on real property” and had “[not] caught the
2 limitation of the Oregon wildcard exemption to personal property.”

3
4 II. Analysis

5 “When a debtor files a Chapter 7 bankruptcy petition, all of
6 the debtor’s assets become property of the bankruptcy estate [under]
7 § 541, subject to the debtor’s right to reclaim certain property as
8 ‘exempt’ [under] § 522(1).” Schwab v. Reilly, 560 U.S. 770, 774 (2010).
9 To assert this right, the debtor must file a list of property that he or
10 she claims as exempt. Mwangi v. Wells Fargo Bank, N.A. (In re Mwangi),
11 764 F.3d 1168, 1173 (9th Cir. 2014). Section 522(b) allows a debtor to
12 exempt property under either federal law or state law, though a state may
13 opt out of the federal system of exemptions. Here, when the Mazzucas
14 filed their chapter 7 bankruptcy petition in December 2009, Oregon had
15 opted out of the federal system of exemptions. See O.R.S. § 18.300
16 (2009). Consequently, they could claim state law exemptions only.⁷

17 “It is well-established that the nature and extent of
18 exemptions is determined as of the date that the bankruptcy petition is
19 filed.” Culver, LLC v. Chiu (In re Chiu), 266 B.R. 743, 751 (9th Cir.
20 BAP 2001) (citations omitted). Moreover, “because lien avoidance is part
21 and parcel of the exemption scheme, the right to avoid a judicial lien
22 must also be determined as of the petition date.” Id. (citations
23 omitted). Because the Mazzucas filed their chapter 7 bankruptcy petition
24 in December 2009, I must look to the 2009 version of O.R.S.

25
26 ⁷ Oregon has since changed O.R.S. § 18.300 to allow a debtor to
claim exemptions either under federal law or state law, but not both.
See O.R.S. § 18.300 (2013).

1 § 18.345(1)(o) in my analysis.

2 Under § 522(f)(1), a debtor may avoid a judicial lien if: "(1)
3 there was a fixing of a lien on an interest of the debtor in property;
4 (2) such lien impairs an exemption to which the debtor would have been
5 entitled; and (3) such lien is a judicial lien." Estate of Catli v.
6 Catli (In re Catli), 999 F.2d 1405, 1406 (9th Cir. 1993). The debtor
7 bears the burden of demonstrating that he or she is entitled to avoid the
8 judicial lien under § 522(f)(1). Id.

9 Here, the only issue before me is whether the Mazzucas are
10 entitled to claim an exemption under O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(o) for their
11 rental real properties. As I stated on the record at the hearing, given
12 the plain language of O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(o), the Mazzucas cannot exempt
13 the rental real properties under that statute as written.

14 "Where the statute's language is plain, the sole function of
15 the courts is to enforce it according to its terms, for courts must
16 presume that a legislature says in a statute what it means and means in a
17 statute what it says there." In re Meruelo Maddux Props., Inc., 667 F.3d
18 1072, 1076 (9th Cir. 2012), quoting Int'l Ass'n of Machinists & Aerospace
19 Workers v. BF Goodrich Aerospace Aerostructures Grp., 387 F.3d 1046, 1051
20 (9th Cir. 2004) (internal quotation marks omitted). As quoted earlier,
21 the 2009 version of O.R.S. § 18.345 provides, in relevant part:

22 (1) All property . . . of the judgment debtor, shall be
23 liable to an execution, except as provided in this
24 section and in other statutes granting exemptions from
25 execution. The following property . . . shall be
26 exempt from execution:

(o) The debtor's interest, not to exceed \$400
in value, in any personal property. However,
this exemption may not be used to increase
the amount of any other exemptions.
(Emphasis added.)

1 The plain language of O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(o) explicitly provides
2 that a debtor may claim an exemption for personal property only. This
3 exemption cannot be applied to any other kinds of property, including
4 rental real property, which the Mazzucas erroneously attempted to do
5 here.

6 Although it is not applicable here, even the 2013 version of
7 O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(o), i.e., O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(p), does not allow the
8 Mazzucas to claim an exemption in the rental real properties. The 2013
9 version of Oregon's "wild card" exemption does not expand its exemption
10 coverage.

11 Because the Mazzucas were not entitled to claim an exemption in
12 the rental real properties under O.R.S. § 18.345(1)(o), they cannot avoid
13 the judicial liens on the rental real properties. Accordingly, I deny
14 their Rental Property Lien Avoidance Motions with prejudice. However, I
15 will grant their Residence Lien Avoidance Motion for the reasons stated
16 earlier. I will enter orders or have entered orders consistent with the
17 conclusions reached in this Memorandum Opinion.

18
19 ###

20 cc: Todd Trierweiler
21 John Scott Mazzuca
22 Jacqueline Ruth Mazzuca
23 Kenneth S. Eiler
24 United States Trustee
25 Wells Fargo Bank
26 Golf Savings Bank