

COURT OF APPEALS OF OREGON

Ringo v. Colquhoun Design Studio, LLC

345 Or. App. 301 (2025) · No. A186670 · Decided December 3, 2025

SUMMARY

The Oregon Court of Appeals sanctioned respondents' counsel for submitting a brief containing fabricated case citations, a fabricated quotation, and a fabricated statement of law, apparently generated with artificial intelligence. The court imposed a \$2,000 monetary sanction payable to the Appellate Court Services Division of the Oregon Judicial Department and struck the respondents' brief. The court permitted respondents to file a replacement brief subject to specified certification requirements concerning authorship and verification of cited authorities.

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

No. 1034 December 3, 2025 301 IN THE COURT OF APPEALS OF THE STATE OF OREGON Charles RINGO, individually, Plaintiff-Appellant, and EQUITY TRUST COMPANY, FBO Charles Ringo #200276790, Plaintiff, v. COLQUHOUN DESIGN STUDIO, LLC, and Jennifer Cohoon, Defendants-Respondents. Deschutes County Circuit Court 23CV48069; A186670 Wells B. Ashby, Judge. Submitted October 27, 2025.

Charles Ringo filed the briefs pro se. Gabriel A. Watson and Watson Law Office PC filed the brief for respondents. Before Egan, Presiding Judge, Lagesen, Chief Judge, and Joyce, Judge. LAGESEN, C. J. Respondents' counsel is directed to pay \$2,000 to the Appellate Court Services Division of the Oregon Judicial Department. Respondents' brief is due 28 days from the date of this opinion.

302 Ringo v. Colquhoun Design Studio, LLC Cite as 345 Or App 301 (2025) 303 LAGESEN, C. J. We face an unfortunate task: What to do when an attorney signs and submits a brief to this court that contains false case citations and a false statement of law? Respondents' attorney filed a brief littered with fabricated cases, a fabricated quotation, and fabricated substantive law.

On our own motion, we struck respondents' brief and issued an order in which we directed respondents to show cause "(1) why this case should not proceed without an answering brief and (2) why this court should not, on its own motion, impose monetary sanctions for submitting a brief * * * that contained nonexistent caselaw and a nonexistent quotation." That show cause order is attached to this opinion as Appendix 1.

Respondents, through their attorney, have responded. For the reasons to follow, we sanction respondents' counsel \$500 for each fabricated citation and \$1,000 for each false quotation or substantive statement of law, for a total of \$2,000, payable to the Appellate Court Services Division of the Oregon Judicial Department.

We allow respondents an opportunity, however, to submit a brief that is supported by existing law. ORCP 17 C(3), which applies to the appellate courts by way of ORAP 1.40(4), provides that an attorney who signs a document filed with the court "certifies that the claims, defenses, and other legal positions taken in the pleading, motion or other document are warranted by existing law or by a nonfrivolous argument for the extension, modification or reversal of existing law or the establishment of new law." An attorney who signs a brief supported in full or in part by nonexistent law—law that is fabricated—thus submits a false certification to the court.

Although respondent's counsel has not acknowledged this directly, we recognize the reality that the fabricated law in respondents' brief likely resulted from the use of artificial intelligence. We also recognize that it has become common to refer to cases and principles fabricated by artificial intelligence as "hallucinations".

We reject that terminology because it obscures both the nature and the seriousness of the situation we face. The word "hallucination" commonly means "perception of objects with no reality arising from disorder of the nervous system or in response to drugs (as LSD)." Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 524 (10th ed 1993).

Here, though, as we understand it, generative artificial intelligence is not perceiving nonexistent law as the result of a disorder. Rather, it is generating nonexistent law in accordance with its design. And that nonexistent law, time and again over the past few years, is being submitted to the courts. This is an exceptionally grave situation for at least three reasons.

First, it is a breach of the attorney's professional duties. The Oregon State Bar has explained: "The most obvious way in which a lawyer could run afoul of Oregon [Rules of Professional Conduct (RPC)] 3.3 [Candor] and 4.1 [Truthfulness] is through the submission of and reliance on unverified and fictitious cases, citations, quotes, or conclusions generated by AI.

Therefore, to avoid violation of Oregon RPCs 3.3 and 4.1, lawyers must review for accuracy any [generative artificial intelligence (GAI)] output discussing case-specific facts or providing a citation, quotation, or conclusion to ensure that the GAI did not hallucinate when providing its answer, or simply get the answer wrong." Oregon State Bar, Formal Opinion No. 2025-205, Artificial Intelligence Tools (February 2025) (footnote omitted).

Second, it strains our limited judicial resources. Every hour spent addressing false citations and statements of law is an hour diverted from those matters in which attorneys have supported their

arguments with precedent that exists.

Although artificial intelligence programs may seem to offer a shortcut for a busy attorney in an individual case, at present, they may create a long cut to justice. Every single time a lawyer relies on false authority, the court will need to take the time to address the situation to, at a minimum, ensure that the public retains confidence that the courts are not relying on fabricated law.

Third, by building and submitting arguments based on nonexistent cases and principles of law, and by failing to take the time to develop competency in the cases and Cite as 345 Or App 301 (2025) 305 principles of law that do in fact exist, the attorney is engaging in conduct that jeopardizes the rule of law. Judicial precedent is the backbone of the rule of law.

By reviewing and applying precedent to each case that comes before it, a court ensures that similarly situated parties are treated equally and that differences in treatment are justified by principled reasons. It is by studying, learning, and applying precedent, that we maintain the rule of law and develop the competency needed to maintain the rule of law.

As Alexander Hamilton explained in Federalist Paper No. 78, “It has been frequently remarked * * that a voluminous code of laws is one of the inconveniences necessarily connected with the advantages of a free government.

To avoid an arbitrary discretion in the courts, it is indispensable that they should be bound down by strict rules and precedents, which serve to define and point out their duty in every particular case that comes before them; and it will readily be conceived from the variety of controversies which grow out of the folly and wickedness of mankind, that the records of those precedents must unavoidably swell to a very considerable bulk, and must demand long and laborious study to acquire a competent knowledge of them.” The Federalist No. 78, at 141 (R.

B. Bernstein ed., 2024). The injection of false precedent into the practice of law shakes the foundation of our judicial system. Although courts no doubt are equipped to catch false citations and statements of law, as noted above, any time we must spend verifying and directing attorneys to address a false statement of law is time away from our core mission: deciding cases that have been briefed under law that, in fact, exists.

We turn to the question of how to address this situation. We easily conclude, as other courts have, that the conduct warrants sanctions against respondents’ counsel. Respondents’ counsel has apologized in the response to our show cause order.

We have attached the response to this opinion as Appendix 2. That apology, while appreciated, does not appear to recognize the gravity of the situation, or come close to addressing it. It does not even supply a clear explanation as to how this happened.

The lack of a 306 *Ringo v. Colquhoun Design Studio, LLC* forthright explanation gives the court little reason to think that the conduct will not recur, absent sanctions. Thus, having examined the decisions of other courts facing similar circumstances, we conclude that monetary sanctions, payable by respondents' counsel, in the amount of \$500 for each false citation, and \$1,000 for each false quotation or statement of law, are in order.

As described more fully in our show cause order, there are two fabricated case citations, and one fabricated statement of law attributed to an existing case, so we sanction respondents' counsel in the amount of \$2,000. Based on our review of the decisions of other courts, we are persuaded that these sanctions are within the range of what is reasonable for this conduct, at least, where, as here, it appears to be an attorney's first time submitting fabricated authority to the court under circumstances suggesting that artificial intelligence may have played a role.¹ As for whether the matter should proceed without a respondents' brief, given that we have stricken the brief supported with the false authority, we conclude that respondents should be given a chance to file a brief.

If respondents opt to maintain their relationship with current counsel, any brief filed by current counsel must contain a certification that (1) counsel drafted the brief and did not use generative artificial intelligence to produce a draft of the brief; (2) counsel has read each case and each other source of law cited in the brief; and (3) counsel has verified that every source of law cited, quoted or paraphrased exists.

In requiring this certification, the court does not intend to preclude counsel. ¹ See, e.g., *Noland v. Land of the Free, L.P.*, 114 Cal App 5th 426, ___, 336 Cal Rptr 3d 897, ___ (2025) (imposing a "conservative sanction of \$10,000" payable to the "clerk of this court within 30 days," reasoning that "[a]ttorney Mostafavi's fabricated citations and erroneous statements of law have required this court to spend excessive time on this otherwise straightforward appeal"); *Shahid v. Esaam*, 376 Ga App 145, 149, 918 SE2d 198, ___ (2025) (explaining that the court would impose a \$2,500 frivolous motion penalty which is the most the law allows under Court of Appeals Rule 7(e)(2)); *In re Baby Boy*, No. 4-24-1427, 2025 WL 2046315 at *22 (Ill App Ct July 21, 2025) (imposing a \$1,000 penalty that "will help deter other attorneys from following in Mr. Panichi's footsteps"); *Garner v. Kadince, Inc.*, 571 P3d 812, 816 (Utah Ct App 2025) (ordering payment of donation of \$1,000 to " 'and Justice for all' within fourteen days * * * and file proof of payment with this court").

Court decisions addressing false precedent generated by artificial intelligence are compiled at <https://www.damiencharlotin.com/hallucinations/>. Cite as 345 Or App 301 (2025) 307 from using services such as Westlaw and Lexis to conduct legal research, or from using standard spelling and grammar checking functions of any word processing program.

The respondents' brief is due with 28 days of the date of this order. No extensions of time will be allowed, unless respondents opt to change counsel, in which case the court is willing to consider a motion for an extension of time not to exceed 35 days. Respondents' counsel is directed to pay \$2,000 to the Appellate Court Services Division of the Oregon Judicial Department.

Respondents' answering brief is due 28 days from the date of this opinion. 308 Ringo v. Colquhoun Design Studio, LLC APPENDIX Cite as 345 Or App 301 (2025) 309 310 Ringo v. Colquhoun Design Studio, LLC Cite as 345 Or App 301 (2025) 311 312 Ringo v. Colquhoun Design Studio, LLC APPENDIX II Cite as 345 Or App 301 (2025) 313 314 Ringo v. Colquhoun Design Studio, LLC Cite as 345 Or App 301 (2025) 315 316 Ringo v. Colquhoun Design Studio, LLC Cite as 345 Or App 301 (2025) 317 318 Ringo v. Colquhoun Design Studio, LLC Cite as 345 Or App 301 (2025) 319 320 Ringo v. Colquhoun Design Studio, LLC