DISTRICT COURT OF APPEAL OF FLORIDA
SECOND DISTRICT

LaVONNE WASHINGTON and MICHAEL WASHINGTON,

Appellants,

v.

GINA JUSTICE and VICTOR CRIST, solely in his official capacity as CLERK OF CIRCUIT COURT & COMPTROLLER, HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY,

Appellees.

No. 2D2025-2678

October 7, 2026

Appeal from the Circuit Court for Hillsborough County; Kemba Damali Johnson Lewis, Judge.

LaVonne Washington and Michael Washington, pro se.

James Uthmeier, Attorney General, Tallahassee, and Juliana Tirado, Assistant Attorney General, Tampa, for Appellee Gina Justice.

Kristen M. Fiore of Akerman LLP, Tallahassee; and Jason L. Margolin, and Keenan Ryan Molaskey of Akerman LLP, Tampa, for Appellee Victor Crist.

PER CURIAM.

LaVonne and Michael Washington filed a notice of appeal seeking review of a final order dismissing their complaint entered in lower tribunal case 24-CA-010301, resulting in this proceeding. The

Washingtons submitted an initial brief citing eleven cases that this court could not locate. We issued an order that directed them to either provide copies of the eleven cases or show cause why sanctions should not be imposed for submitting a brief that relied on fictitious case law. Considering the Washingtons' numerous meritless filings in this case and two others related to lower tribunal case 24-CA-010301, our order specifically named dismissal and an order barring further pro se filings as possible sanctions.

The Washingtons did not provide copies of the eleven cases named in our order to show cause. Rather, they describe the citations as scrivener's errors "resulting from intense logistical pressure." They claim they were "forced to manually consolidate overlapping fully briefed legal arguments across three distinct appellate tracks . . . without professional legal verification software." The Washingtons claim the fake case citations were the result of the volume and page numbers being "mangled" during drafting. The Washingtons also insist that their brief was filed prior to the promulgation of Florida Rule of General Practice and Judicial Administration 2.515(d)(2)(D), *see In re Amends. to Fla. R. of Gen. Prac. & Jud. Admin. 2.515*, 435 So. 3d 5 (Fla. 2026), and that this court cannot apply that rule retroactively to sanction them.

The Washingtons' response fails to adequately explain the inclusion of the fabricated case citations. Their response neither confesses nor denies that the fictitious case citations were the result of using generative artificial intelligence. *See generally Russell v. Mells*, 426 So. 3d 913, 918 n.3 (Fla. 2d DCA 2025) (explaining generative artificial intelligence models and hallucinations). It is likely that the inclusion of the fake case citations is the result of generative artificial intelligence. *See id.* at 919-20 ("None of us can recall an instance when an attorney

accidentally submitted a completely fabricated case as a legal authority to a court of law—not until the recent advent of generative artificial intelligence."). Regardless, it is not the source of the fictitious cases that concerns us, but the Washingtons' reliance on them in their brief.

Several courts, including this one, have held that the submission of fictitious cases is sanctionable. *See*, *e.g.*, *Clerk of Ct. & Comptroller for 13th Jud. Cir., Hillsborough Cnty. v. Rangel*, 427 So. 3d 1069, 1071 (Fla. 2d DCA 2025); *Gouveia v. Meridian Fin. Invs., LLC*, 432 So. 3d 49, 51 (Fla. 4th DCA 2026); *Hessert v. Hessert*, 431 So. 3d 610, 614 (Fla. 6th DCA 2026); *Takefman v. Pickleball Club, LLC*, 418 So. 3d 826, 827 (Fla. 3d DCA 2025); *Gutierrez v. Gutierrez*, 399 So. 3d 1185, 1188 (Fla. 3d DCA 2024). Such submissions are sanctionable because they abuse the adversary system, waste the time of the court, and could harm the reputation of judges and parties whose names are falsely invoked in connection with the hallucinated citations. *Goya v. Hayashida*, 418 So. 3d 652, 655-56 (Fla. 4th DCA 2025). The Washingtons' response fails to justify or excuse their submission of fake case citations.

And this court need not retroactively apply rule 2.515(d)(2)(D) to impose sanctions. To specifically address the issue of fictitious case citations generated by generative artificial intelligence tools, the supreme court amended rule 2.515(d)(2) to provide that the signer of a filing certifies the legal authorities identified in the filing "exist and are accurately cited." *In re Amends. to Fla. Rule of Gen. Prac. & Jud. Admin. 2.515*, 435 So. 3d at 6. Prior to the amendment, courts applied the earlier version of rule 2.515(d)(2) and held that pro se parties and attorneys represented the accuracy of a filing by signing it. *See Hessert*, 431 So. 3d at 613 ("Florida's appellate courts, like other courts, require pro se litigants and attorneys to sign their filings and thereby represent

the accuracy thereof."); *see also Davidson v. Chang-Warner*, 51 Fla. L. Weekly D1311, D1311 (Fla. 6th DCA June 26, 2026) ("[T]he explicit requirements and sanctions authority of the amendments to rule 2.515(d)(2) merely clarify what already fell within the scope of the pre-existing requirements of rule 2.515(d)(2)."). Because a citation to a nonexistent case is not accurate, signing a filing that contains fictitious citations breaches that representation. Under rule 9.410(a), this court has the authority to sanction such a breach without reliance on the amended version of the rule. *See Davidson*, 51 Fla. L. Weekly at D1311. ("[R]ule 2.515(d)(2) as amended now explicitly authorizes what Florida Rule of Appellate Procedure 9.410(a) already allowed—namely, for appellate courts to sanction pro se litigants and attorneys for failing to follow the requirements of rule 2.515(d)(2).").

In deciding whether sanctions are warranted, we also consider the Washingtons' history of filing across this case and the other two proceedings identified in our order to show cause, 2D2025-1883 and 2D2025-2170. Appeal 2D2025-1883 was dismissed as from a nonfinal, nonappealable order. In case 2D2025-2170, we denied the Washingtons' meritless petition for writ of quo warranto and all writs. Across all three cases, the Washingtons raised meritless challenges to this court's fee orders and filed meritless motions for rehearing. "[A]ny citizen . . . abuses the right to pro se access [to the courts] by filing repetitious and frivolous pleadings, thereby diminishing the ability of the courts to devote their finite resources to the consideration of legitimate claims." *State v. Spencer*, 751 So. 2d 47, 48 (Fla. 1999).

Based on the Washingtons' reliance on fictious cases, unavailing response to this court's order, and pattern of frivolous filings, we dismiss this appeal. *See* Fla. R. App. P. 9.410(a). Further, we direct the clerk of

this court to place in an inactive file any original proceedings or notices of appeal filed by LaVonne or Michael Washington related to Hillsborough County Circuit Court case 24-CA-010301 unless the filing is signed by a member in good standing of The Florida Bar or related to a proceeding pending at the time this opinion issues.[1]

Affirmed.

NORTHCUTT, KELLY, and MORRIS, JJ., Concur.

Opinion subject to revision prior to official publication.

[1] We note that the Washingtons have other proceedings pending in this court unrelated to the lower tribunal case at issue in this appeal. We caution that further frivolous filings or the submission of fictitious case citations in those cases may result in additional sanctions.