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Clerk of the
Appellate Courts

IN THE COURT OF APPEALS OF TENNESSEE
AT NASHVILLE
Assigned on Briefs May 1, 2026

**HARDING PLACE MULTIFAMILY PARTNERS, LLC D/B/A/ EMERSON
AT HARDING v. SAMUEL ROBINSON**

**Appeal from the Circuit Court for Davidson County
No. 25C429 Lynne T. Ingram, Judge**

No. M2025-01361-COA-R3-CV

A residential management company sought damages related to a tenant's recent eviction. The circuit court awarded damages, and the tenant appealed. After careful review, we conclude that the tenant's brief contains inaccurate citations throughout that reflect the hallmarks of artificial intelligence. We disregard the inaccurate or fabricated portions of the brief. Discerning no error in the trial court's decision, we affirm.

Tenn. R. App. P. 3 Appeal as of Right; Judgment of the Circuit Court Affirmed

ANDY D. BENNETT, J., delivered the opinion of the Court, in which THOMAS R. FRIERSON, II, and CARMA DENNIS MCGEE, JJ., joined.

Samuel Robinson, Hendersonville, Tennessee, pro se.

Trevor S. Baskin, Nashville, Tennessee, for the appellee, Harding Place Multifamily Partners, LLC d/b/a Emerson at Harding.

OPINION

FACTUAL AND PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND

Harding Place Multifamily Partners, LLC is the owner and operator of a residential apartment community in Nashville known as "Emerson at Harding" ("Emerson"). Samuel Robinson is a former tenant at Emerson. In October 2023, Mr. Robinson entered into a residential lease agreement with Emerson for a one-year term beginning in November 2023. Shortly after entering into the lease agreement, Mr. Robinson defaulted on his

payment obligation, and Emerson began eviction proceedings in January 2024. Mr. Robinson was removed from the property in February 2024.

In October 2024, Emerson filed a civil warrant in Davidson County General Sessions Court against Mr. Robinson, seeking damages resulting from his time at the apartment. The next month, Mr. Robinson filed a counterclaim against Emerson, alleging that the process for issuing civil warrants in Tennessee was unconstitutional, breach of contract, negligence, improper service of process, fraud, and racial discrimination. In January 2025, the general sessions court entered two orders, which together resulted in a judgment in favor of Emerson and the dismissal of Mr. Robinson's claims with prejudice.

Mr. Robinson appealed the orders to the Circuit Court for Davidson County and, in March 2024, filed a "motion to vacate judgment of the general sessions court" under Tenn. R. Civ. P. 60.02. The circuit court entered an order interpreting the motion as one to set the matter for a trial and scheduled the trial for July 23, 2025. The court held a trial and, on August 6, 2025, entered an order dismissing Mr. Robinson's claims with prejudice and entering a judgment in favor of Emerson in the amount of \$7,759.59. The court also awarded Emerson its reasonable attorney's fees.

Mr. Robinson timely appealed. His brief to this Court does not include a statement of the issues presented for review; however, we conclude that this procedural defect does not significantly impede the appellate process and will address the merits of the appeal. *See DiNovo v. Binkley*, 706 S.W.3d 334, 336 (Tenn. 2025) (directing this Court to reach the merits of appeals when procedural defects do not "significantly impede the appellate process"). We discern the issues presented to be: (1) whether the circuit court was correct to hold a de novo hearing on Mr. Robinson's appeal rather than on his motion to vacate the general sessions judgment, (2) whether the circuit court properly resolved Mr. Robinson's claims related to the lease agreement, (3) whether the circuit court properly resolved Mr. Robinson's constitutional claim, (4) whether the circuit court properly dismissed Mr. Robinson's fraud claim, and (5) whether the circuit court properly denied Mr. Robinson's racial discrimination claim.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

We review questions of law de novo without a presumption of correctness afforded to the lower court's conclusions. *Ramsay v. Custer*, 387 S.W.3d 566, 567 (Tenn. Ct. App. 2012). We review the trial court's findings of fact de novo upon the record with a presumption of correctness, unless the preponderance of the evidence is otherwise. TENN. R. APP. P. 13(d); *Allen v. Allen*, No. W2010-00920-COA-R3-CV, 2011 WL 198516, at *3 (Tenn. Ct. App. Jan. 12, 2011).

ANALYSIS

I.

Mr. Robinson proceeded pro se throughout these proceedings. Therefore, we begin with a discussion regarding pro se litigants in this Court:

Parties who decide to represent themselves are entitled to equal treatment by the court. *Murray v. Miracle*, 457 S.W.3d 399, 402 (Tenn. Ct. App. 2014). The court should take into account that many pro se litigants have no legal training and little familiarity with the judicial system. *Id.* However, the court must also be mindful of the boundary between fairness to the pro se litigant and unfairness to the pro se litigant's adversary. *Id.* While the court should give pro se litigants who are untrained in the law a certain amount of leeway in drafting their pleadings and briefs, it must not excuse pro se litigants from complying with the same substantive and procedural rules that represented parties are expected to observe. *Hessmer v. Hessmer*, 138 S.W.3d 901, 903 (Tenn. Ct. App. 2003).

Lacy v. Mitchell, 541 S.W.3d 55, 59 (Tenn. Ct. App. 2016). Thus, unrepresented parties must comply with the procedural rules concerning the content of appellate briefs. *See* TENN. R. APP. P. 27. The Rules of Appellate Procedure require parties to file briefs that include an argument section containing "the contentions of the appellant with respect to the issues presented . . . with citations to the authorities . . . relied on." TENN. R. APP. P. 27(a)(7)(A). Tennessee Court of Appeals Rule 17.01 further provides that:

By presenting to the court (whether by signing, filing, submitting, or later advocating) a . . . brief, . . . an attorney or unrepresented party is certifying that to the best of the person's knowledge, information, and belief, formed after an inquiry reasonable under the circumstances, —

. . .

(2) the issues, claims, defenses, and other legal contentions therein 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[.]

Unfortunately, Mr. Robinson's brief fails to comply with this rule as it contains numerous false quotations from case law and statutes and, in some instances, outright fake citations. In this way, Mr. Robinson's brief bears all the hallmarks of an artificial intelligence-generated brief, filled with what has been referred to as "hallucinations." *See Simmons v. Islam*, No. M2025-01261-COA-R3-CV, 2026 WL 1431143, at *7 n.3 (Tenn. Ct. App. May 21, 2026). A federal district court has defined hallucinations in AI-assisted research to be one of the following three types of errors:

(1) fabricated cases (whether a nonexistent case name and citation, an existing case name with an invented citation, or a real citation that leads to a wholly unrelated decision); (2) fabricated quotations from actual cases; and (3) misstatements of law (representations of legal rules, standards, or holdings that are inaccurate, incomplete, or unsupported by any real authority, including AI-generated summaries that distort or materially alter what a case actually decided).

Andre v. Warden, FCI Danbury, 827 F. Supp. 3d 294, 305 (D. Conn. 2025). Mr. Robinson’s brief contains all of these forms of hallucinations. For instance, Mr. Robinson cites to “*First Tenn. Bank Nat’l Ass’n v. McClure*, 199 S.W.3d 429, 432 (Tenn. Ct. App. 2005).” While there is a real case under that name, it is not reported in the South Western Reporter. The citation given actually leads to the dissent of a case from the Court of Appeals of Texas, *City of Seabrook v. Port of Houston Auth.*, 199 S.W.3d 403 (Tex. App. 2006). Further, the real *McClure* case is not from 2005 but from 1990. *See First Tenn. Bank Nat’l Ass’n v. McClure*, No. 169, 1990 WL 6378 (Tenn. Ct. App. Jan 31, 1990).

This issue of AI hallucinations is prevalent in Mr. Robinson’s statutory citations as well. His brief quotes Tenn. Code Ann. § 66-28-304(a) as “A landlord shall: . . . (4) Maintain in good and safe working order and condition all electrical, plumbing, sanitary, heating, ventilating air-conditioning and other facilities and appliances supplied or required to be supplied by the landlord.”¹ If this quotation were accurate, it would certainly be a boon to Mr. Robinson’s case, as part of his argument is centered around negligent maintenance of his apartment’s air conditioning system, plumbing system, and various appliances by Emerson. However, that section of the code, Tenn. Code Ann. § 66-28-304(a)(4), actually states: “In multi-unit complexes of four (4) or more units, provide and maintain appropriate receptacles and conveniences for the removal of ashes, garbage, rubbish and other waste from common points of collection subject to § 66-28-401(3),” language which is certainly less helpful to Mr. Robinson’s position.

Further still, some cases appear to be fabricated entirely as Mr. Robinson cites to “*Puckett v. Estate of Puckett*, 174 S.W.3d 252, 257 (Tenn. 2005).” The given location in the reporter is actually for the Court of Appeals case *Emmit v. Emmit*, 174 S.W.3d 248 (Tenn. Ct. App. 2005), and we are unable to find any Tennessee Supreme Court case under the cited case name.

¹ The language cited by Mr. Robinson appears in the Uniform Residential Landlord and Tenant Act, *see* UNIF. RESIDENTIAL LANDLORD & TENANT ACT 1972 § 2.104, which is not the authority cited by the brief and is not the law of this state. *See Heirs of Ellis v. Est. of Ellis*, 71 S.W.3d 705, 713-14 (Tenn. 2002) (stating that “when the legislature makes significant departures from the text of [the] uniform act, we must likewise presume that its departure was meant to express an intention different from that manifest in the uniform act itself”).

“Artificial intelligence may ultimately prove a helpful tool to assist *pro se* litigants in bringing meritorious cases to the courts.” *Moales v. Land Rover Cherry Hill*, No. 3:25-CV-544 (VDO), 2025 WL 1249616, at *3 (D. Conn. Apr. 30, 2025). However, “repeated misuse of artificial intelligence undermines the genuine role it may ultimately have in contributing to the cause of justice.” *Braica v. Frankowski*, 826 F. Supp. 3d 286, 293 (D. Conn. 2025) (citing *Moales*, 2025 WL 1249616, at *3). Much of Mr. Robinson’s argument cites real cases but uses false or misleading quotations from those cases. “Without question, it is improper and unacceptable for litigants – including *pro se* litigants – to submit ‘non-existent judicial opinions with fake quotes and citations.’” *Anonymous v. N. Y. C. Dep’t of Educ.*, No. 1:24-CV-04232, 2024 WL 3460049, at *7 (S.D.N.Y. July 18, 2024) (quoting *Mata v. Avianca, Inc.*, 678 F. Supp. 3d 443, 448 (S.D.N.Y. 2023)). While Mr. Robinson has a right to self-representation, “the right to self-representation ‘does not exempt a party from compliance with relevant rules of procedural and substantive law.’” *Id.* (quoting *Tragath v. Zuck*, 710 F.2d 90, 95 (2d Cir. 1983)); *see also Hessmer*, 138 S.W.3d at 903. As one federal circuit recently put it, “[w]hatever the merits of artificial intelligence, it is no substitute for actual intelligence.” *Akerlund v. Atlas Air, Inc.*, --- F.4th ---, No. 24-11033, 2026 WL 1993146, at *5 (11th Cir. July 10, 2026). Put simply, artificial intelligence, in part due to its lack of “actual intelligence,” is not yet, or may never be, a reliable substitute for thorough legal research.

Because of the inaccurate citations to law, Mr. Robinson’s arguments are not “warranted by existing law,” as required by Tenn. Ct. App. R. 17.01. Surprisingly, Emerson does not raise the improprieties in Mr. Robinson’s brief or request that we find the arguments advanced to be waived. Therefore, we believe the best course is to disregard the citations in Mr. Robinson’s brief that do not accurately reflect what the authority states and address the arguments without consideration of fictitious or meritless arguments.

We must also note that the record on appeal does not contain a transcript of the proceedings in the circuit court. As we have explained:

Tenn. R. App. P. 24(b) provides that it is the duty of the appellant to prepare “a transcript of such part of the evidence or proceedings as is necessary to convey a fair, accurate and complete account of what transpired with respect to those issues that are the bases of appeal.” Tenn. R. App. P. 24(c) allows that where a transcript is not available, “the appellant shall prepare a statement of the evidence” which “should convey a fair, accurate and complete account of what transpired with respect to those issues that are the bases of appeal.”

Allen, 2011 WL 198516, at *3. Mr. Robinson has chosen not to file a transcript or statement of the evidence. “[I]n the absence of an evidentiary record, appellate courts will presume the record supports the lower courts’ findings of fact.” *Fayne v. Vincent*, 301 S.W.3d 162, 169-170 (Tenn. 2009); *see also Sherrod v. Wix*, 849 S.W.2d 780, 783 (Tenn. Ct. App.

1992). This means that, “in cases where no transcript or statement of the evidence is filed, the appellate court is required to presume that the record, had it been properly preserved, would have supported the action of the trial court.” *Allen*, 2011 WL 198516, at *3. The presumption “that the parties presented sufficient evidence to support the trial court’s judgment” is conclusive. *Ramsay*, 387 S.W.3d at 568. With all of these considerations in mind, we turn to the arguments on appeal.

II.

Mr. Robinson first asserts that the circuit court was required to address his motion to vacate the general sessions order. This assertion misses the mark because it misunderstands the nature of appeals from general sessions courts. After a general sessions court has rendered a judgment in a case, any party may appeal from that decision to the circuit court of the county within ten days. *See* Tenn. Code Ann. § 27-5-108(a)(1). The “appeal shall be heard de novo in the circuit court.” *Id.* § 27-5-108(c). “In conducting its de novo review, the circuit court must try the matter ‘as if no other hearing had occurred’ and render judgment ‘as if no judgment had previously been rendered.’” *731 Real Est. Grp., LLC v. Fuzzell*, No. W2024-01053-COA-R3-CV, 2025 WL 2977085, at *2 (Tenn. Ct. App. Oct. 22, 2025) (quoting *State v. Cunningham*, 972 S.W.2d 16, 18 (Tenn. Crim. App. 1998)). Stated another way, “the circuit court is ‘not concerned with what took place in the lower court[,]’ and ‘a perfected appeal from the general sessions court to the circuit court abrogates the judgment of the general sessions court.’” *Elliott v. Wright*, No. E2024-01003-COA-R3-CV, 2025 WL 2621633, at *3 (Tenn. Ct. App. Sept. 11, 2025) (quoting *State v. Kirk*, 392 S.W.3d 622, 624 (Tenn. Crim. App. 2011)). Therefore, once Mr. Robinson filed his appeal from the general sessions order to the circuit court, the order of the general sessions court was a nullity, meaning there was no operative order from which Mr. Robinson could seek relief under Tenn. R. Civ. P. 60.02.²

The circuit court treated Mr. Robinson’s motion as one seeking to set the matter for trial, and we find no error in that decision. *See State v. NV Sumatra Tobacco Trading Co.*, 403 S.W.3d 726, 739 (Tenn. 2013) (“Courts should give effect to the substance of motions rather than their form or title.”). Mr. Robinson’s motion asserted a basis for relief that was unfounded; he was, in essence, asking the circuit court to review the general sessions judgment for alleged defects. The de novo trial in the circuit court essentially did just that by allowing Mr. Robinson to assert any claims he had regarding evidence and jurisdiction. Therefore, the circuit court gave effect to the motion through a different, though actually viable, avenue than the method Mr. Robinson was asserting.

² Mr. Robinson also argues that the general sessions order was void because it violated his due process rights. However, once he filed his appeal of that order, it became a nullity, and he was fully able to dispute the circuit court’s jurisdiction to hear his case. Additionally, Mr. Robinson asserts that the general sessions judgment was void because it did not resolve all of his claims. The record does not support this assertion. A review of the general sessions court’s judgment shows that the court did, in fact, resolve all of his claims by finding that he failed to prove them and dismissing them.

Mr. Robinson's remaining arguments cannot overcome the presumption of correctness afforded to the circuit court's factual findings because of the absence of a transcript or statement of the evidence. Turning first to his habitability and negligent maintenance claims, the court resolved them by finding that Mr. Robinson failed to provide notice to Emerson, as required by the lease. As explained above, these factual findings are afforded a conclusive presumption of correctness and, therefore, this argument falls short. The court also found that no credible evidence was submitted to show the alleged property conditions, a finding we are bound to accept, making this argument unavailing. Mr. Robinson relatedly argues that the provision of the lease requiring written notice of maintenance requests was contrary to public policy and void. This argument is misplaced because the lease did not relieve Emerson of any statutorily mandated obligations and as explained above, the statutory provision cited for this argument is not accurate.

Mr. Robinson asserts that the circuit court erred by failing to address the constitutional claims he raised, in the way it resolved his fraud claims, and in the way it resolved his racial discrimination claim. The court resolved these claims thusly:

With regard to the Defendant's counterclaim alleging unconstitutionality in the manner in which defendant was noticed of the detainer warrant, the Defendant testified that he was not afforded sufficient notice of the initial detainer action to prepare an adequate defense. The Court finds that the issuance and service of the detainer warrant complied with T.C.A. § 29-18-115(e), and that the Defendant had sufficient opportunity to respond and appear.

Defendant further alleged that Plaintiff committed fraud upon the Court by falsifying service of process and by misleading Defendant about the eviction. The Court finds that no evidence was presented supporting such claims. The testimony and exhibits reflect that Plaintiff's property manager followed the required eviction procedures, and there is no proof of deceitful conduct.

Defendant's counterclaim under 42 U.S.C. § 1981, alleging racial discrimination, is likewise unsupported. No testimony or evidence was introduced to suggest that any actions taken by Plaintiff were motivated by racial animus or resulted in disparate treatment on the basis of race.

Although not entirely clear, we discern that Mr. Robinson's arguments on these issues all relate to factual findings underlying the decision. We presume the circuit court's factual findings related to those issues are correct due to the lack of a transcript or statement of the evidence. As to his constitutional claim, Mr. Robinson asserts that he raised a broader argument about the statute than how the circuit court resolved his claim. However, without a transcript or statement of the evidence, we presume the action of the circuit court was

supported by the evidence submitted at the trial. *See Allen*, 2011 WL 198516, at *3. Mr. Robinson's arguments are unavailing.

CONCLUSION

The judgment of the trial court is affirmed. Costs of this appeal are assessed against the appellant, Samuel Robinson, for which execution may issue if necessary.

/s/ Andy D. Bennett
ANDY D. BENNETT, JUDGE