



Feb. 26, 2026

Attorney Grievance Committee
Third Judicial Department
100 Great Oaks Blvd., Suite 129
Albany, NY 12203-7919
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Re: Attorney Disciplinary Complaint Against Sean Skedzielewski, Esq.

This complaint is brought against Sean Skedzielewski, Esq., an attorney admitted to practice law in the State of New York (Registration No. 6112429), for violations of the New York Rules of Professional Conduct (22 NYCRR Part 1200). I write on behalf of Freedom of the Press Foundation, a nonprofit and nonpartisan organization dedicated to protecting journalists' rights.

Introduction

Skedzielewski, acting as an attorney for the U.S. Department of Justice, has made materially false and recklessly misleading statements to federal courts while opposing injunctive relief sought by journalists and protesters challenging Department of Homeland Security agents' suppression of First Amendment rights, often while masked and unidentified.¹ Specifically, Skedzielewski fabricated the existence of "violent terrorist organizations" attacking federal agents in "riots" and exposing their families to danger through "doxing," when no such circumstances existed.

Fabricating a violent terrorist invasion of America's third largest city to justify suppression of First Amendment rights is not aggressive advocacy, but an effort to subvert the rule of law and an embarrassment to the legal profession. While Skedzielewski's conduct is particularly egregious, it is part of a well-documented trend of federal government lawyers abusing the deference judges afford them by making false and outlandish claims

¹ See, e.g., *Chicago Headline Club et al. v. Kristi Noem et al.*, No. 25-cv-12173 (N.D. Ill), [Transcript \(Oct. 6, 2025\)](#), p. 49.

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in court.² Recent reports indicate that federal prosecutors' offices are struggling to recruit due to the current administration's efforts to politicize the DOJ.³

It is good news that many lawyers are unwilling to compromise their integrity for the administration, but those who have no such reservations have not yet faced consequences. Those with the power to discipline attorneys need to rise to the moment.

This Committee should demand that Skedzielewski produce evidence supporting his claims about violent terrorists invading American cities, rioting, and doxing ICE agents and their families. If the answer is unsatisfactory, this Committee should discipline Skedzielewski to send a clear message that such conduct will not be tolerated.

Background

The injunctive proceedings in Chicago involved allegations that DHS agents engaged in improper and violent conduct toward protesters, as well journalists who were lawfully observing and reporting on immigration enforcement operations and related demonstrations at ICE's Broadview, Illinois facility and locations in and around Chicago.

During the October 6, 2025 hearing, Skedzielewski characterized the situation in Broadview as "a riot with violent terrorist organizations attempting to dox ICE and their family."⁴ This characterization is materially and completely false. There was no riot and there certainly were no violent terrorist organizations present or involved in protests against ICE or attempting to "dox" ICE agents or their families. Skedzielewski presented no evidence to support these claims. Hyperbole is one thing, but a licensed attorney making up organized terrorist invasions of major cities is quite another.

The presiding judge's response – "Well, I think we have a different idea of what's going on in Chicago" – underscores the absurdity of a federal attorney claiming that the city where the judge sits is being invaded by terrorist groups that do not exist.⁵ No government witnesses who publicly testified under oath or submitted affidavits provided

² Ryan Goodman et al., [The "Presumption of Regularity" in Trump Administration Litigation](#), Just Security, Sept. 15, 2025.

³ Glenn Thrush et al., [Demanding Support for Trump, Justice Dept. Struggles to Recruit Prosecutors](#), N.Y. Times, Feb. 7, 2026; see also Aaron Blake, [The Trump DOJ's slow-motion Saturday Night Massacre](#), CNN, Oct. 16, 2025; Carol Leonnig et al., [Inside Trump's DOJ: Punitive firings, public scoldings and pressure to prosecute foes](#), MSNBC, Oct. 16, 2025.

⁴ [Transcript](#), supra n.1, at p 49.

⁵ *Id.*

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any specific factual basis for Skedzielewski’s alarming claims, and there is no indication that he and his colleagues made any effort to substantiate them.

This was not a one-time occurrence. In a similar case in Los Angeles where journalists and protesters sought a temporary restraining order against ICE abuses (also defended by Skedzielewski), a judge found not a “shred of evidence” supporting the government’s “baseless accusations” that the plaintiffs participated in “violent riots.”⁶

Notably, in a separate but related case in Chicago, U.S. District Court Judge April Perry similarly remarked that the government claims similar to those made by Skedzielewski were “simply unreliable” and that she had seen “no credible evidence that there is danger of rebellion in the state of Illinois.”⁷ Judge Perry was ruling on Illinois and Chicago’s challenge to the federal deployment of National Guard troops. The administration relied on claims of an imaginary violent rebellion in the streets of Chicago similar to the claims advanced by Skedzielewski.⁸

On Oct. 15, 2025, the Seventh Circuit unanimously affirmed Judge Perry’s findings, despite affording the administration “great deference.”⁹ The court saw no evidence in the record before it of organized violent terrorism – evidence that surely the government would have produced, had it existed, to justify deployment of the National Guard.

And yet Skedzielewski and his team did not correct the record or change course, arguing just days later, on Oct. 20, that a federal agent was under such dire threat that his face could not safely be sketched by court artists for fear that someone might connect his

⁶ Kevin Gosztola, [‘Surprising Savagery’: US Court Prohibits Attacks On Journalists Covering ICE Protests](#), *The Dissenter*, Sept. 11, 2025; see also Hillel Aron, [News groups ask judge to increase protections for journalists covering LA protests](#), *Courthouse News Serv.*, August 25, 2025.

⁷ Jon Seidel & Tina Sfondeles, [Federal judge hits Trump administration credibility in siding with city and state against National Guard deployment](#), *WBEZ*, Oct. 9, 2025.

⁸ Judge Perry noted that her ruling came after “four separate, unrelated legal decisions from different neutral parties” in the preceding 48 hours “cast significant doubt on DHS’ credibility and assessment of what is happening on the streets of Chicago.” Caitlyn Rosen, [Trump temporarily blocked from deploying National Guard in Illinois](#), *Courthouse News Serv.*, Oct. 9, 2025. This included grand juries rejecting criminal charges brought by federal prosecutors against individuals arrested during protests. *Id.*

⁹ *Illinois v. Trump*, 155 F.4th 929, 938 (7th Cir. 2025).

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face with his name and carry out a bounty. A google search, apparently by the judge's staff, showed that his public LinkedIn profile featured his face, location and job title.¹⁰

It is important to note that it is irrelevant that officials in the Trump administration have made claims similar to Skedzielewski's. Officers of the court have ample notice that claims by administration officials – which often publicly fall apart when subjected to journalistic or legal scrutiny – must be verified before being presented to a judge.¹¹

Just as attorneys have been disciplined for parroting unsubstantiated claims of election fraud despite politicians and pundits making similar claims, attorneys suggesting to the court that there is an ongoing organized terrorist invasion of an American city are ethically obligated to ensure the existence of a basis in fact for such extreme claims.¹² It is not the role of the courts, or of government lawyers, to normalize politicians' lies.

Violations of the New York Rules of Professional Conduct

Unsurprisingly, there are few precedents specifically addressing attorneys fabricating terrorist invasions. That is not because doing so is consistent with the Rules of Professional Conduct – it is because few have had the nerve to try. Skedzielewski's conduct violates the following rules:

Rule 3.3(a)(1): False Statements to Tribunal

Rule 3.3(a)(1) provides that "A lawyer shall not knowingly make a false statement of fact or law to a tribunal or fail to correct a false statement of material fact or law previously made to the tribunal by the lawyer." 22 NYCRR § 1200.0, Rule 3.3(a)(1).

¹⁰ Seth Stern, *Judge Censored an ICE Agent's Face Over "Threats." His Info Was a Google Search Away*, The Intercept, Feb. 3, 2026. This argument was made by Department of Justice attorney Samuel Holt.

¹¹ See, e.g., C.J. Ciaramella, [Homeland Security Won't Stop Lying About Who Immigration Enforcers Are Arresting](#), Reason, Oct. 22, 2025; Scott Pelley et al., [Fired Justice Department lawyer says he refused to lie in the Abrego Garcia case](#), CBS News, Oct. 19, 2025; Rebecca Schneid, [Trump Administration Accused of 'Propaganda' for Shifting Story in Shooting Amid ICE Protests](#), Time, Oct. 18, 2025.

¹² See, e.g., *In re Giuliani*, 197 A.D.3d 1 (N.Y. App. Div. 1st Dep't 2024); *In re Eastman*, No. SBC-23-O-30029 (Cal. State Bar Ct. Mar. 27, 2024), *aff'd In re Eastman*, No. SBC-23-O-30029 (Cal. State Bar Ct. Rev. Dep't June 13, 2025); *King v. Whitmer*, 556 F. Supp. 3d 680 (E.D. Mich. 2021), *aff'd in part, rev'd in part*, 71 F.4th 511 (6th Cir. 2023), *cert. denied*, 144 S. Ct. 571 (2024).

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Skedzielewski violated this rule by claiming the existence of "violent terrorist organizations" and a "riot" in Chicago during a hearing before the Northern District of Illinois on October 6, 2025, when no such circumstances existed.

It is understandable that the drafters of attorney ethics rules did not specifically contemplate fabrication of violent terrorist riots by licensed attorneys, but Skedzielewski's conduct clearly violates this fundamental duty of candor. Courts consistently find that false statements to tribunals warrant discipline.¹³

Rule 3.1: Baseless Claims

Rule 3.1(a) provides that "A lawyer shall not bring or defend a proceeding, or assert or controvert an issue therein, unless there is a basis in law and fact for doing so that is not frivolous."¹⁴ The rule's commentary requires that lawyers "inform themselves about the facts of their clients' cases and the applicable law, and determine that they can make good-faith arguments in support of their clients' positions."¹⁵

While lawyers have latitude for creative legal arguments, there is no "breathing room" for fabricating facts. And it is reasonable to expect an attorney to do extra due diligence before claiming terrorist groups are organizing violent riots.

Rule 8.4(c): Dishonesty and Misrepresentation

Rule 8.4(c) prohibits conduct "involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit or misrepresentation." 22 NYCRR § 1200.0, Rule 8.4(c). Skedzielewski's fabrication of violent terrorism constitutes dishonest conduct and a misrepresentation of the most serious nature.

Rule 8.4(d): Conduct Prejudicial to Administration of Justice

Rule 8.4(d) prohibits "conduct that is prejudicial to the administration of justice." 22 NYCRR § 1200.0, Rule 8.4(d). By making wildly false claims as described above, Skedzielewski misled the court and undermined the judicial process.¹⁶

¹³ See, e.g., *Matter of Holtzman*, 78 N.Y.2d 184, 193 (1991) (disciplining a lawyer for making false accusations against a judge, as conduct adversely reflecting on her fitness to practice law).

¹⁴ 22 NYCRR § 1200.0, Rule 3.1.

¹⁵ *Id.*, Comment [2].

¹⁶ See, e.g. *In re Vincenti*, 152 N.J. 253, 704 A.2d 927 (1998) (attorney disbarred for a pattern of misconduct, including for making outrageous and unfounded allegations); *In re Westfall* (808



Rule 8.4(h): Conduct Reflecting Adversely on Fitness

Rule 8.4(h) prohibits “any other conduct that adversely reflects on the lawyer’s fitness as a lawyer.” 22 NYCRR § 1200.0, Rule 8.4(h). Willingness to fabricate the existence of violent terrorist organizations demonstrates a fundamental lack of fitness to practice law.

Constitutional and Policy Implications

The Supreme Court has said that government attorneys are not merely advocates but have duties to truth and the Constitution that transcend winning any case.¹⁷ As such, courts often defer to the government’s claims about national security and terrorism.¹⁸ When government lawyers lie about domestic terrorism to justify sidestepping the First Amendment, they exploit this deference to defeat judicial oversight.

In the 2025 study *The ‘Presumption of Regularity’ in Trump Administration Litigation*, scholars identified over 40 examples of courts expressing distrust of information and representations submitted by lawyers serving the current administration, and nearly 60 cases of courts finding arbitrary and capricious administrative action.¹⁹ These misrepresentations are at their most serious when they involve matters like terrorism.

In past years, those seeking to justify abuses hurled accusations of radicalism, communism or espionage.²⁰ These days, though, the word “terrorism” carries unique legal and political weight. Designating individuals as “terrorists” or “terrorist organizations” can trigger enhanced law enforcement powers and reduced procedural

S.W.2d 829 (Mo. 1991) (prosecutor suspended for making unfounded accusations that a judge had acted dishonestly without reasonable basis).

¹⁷ *Berger v. United States*, 295 U.S. 78, 88 (1935) (“The United States Attorney is the representative not of an ordinary party to a controversy, but of a sovereignty whose obligation to govern impartially is as compelling as its obligation to govern at all”), *overruled on other grounds by Stirone v. United States*, 361 U.S. 212 (1960). See also 22 NYCRR § 1200.0, Rule 3.8, Comment [1] (stating that “[a] prosecutor has the responsibility of a minister of justice and not simply that of an advocate”).

¹⁸ See, e.g., *Holder v. Humanitarian Law Project*, 561 U.S. 1, 33-34 (2010).

¹⁹ Goodman, *supra* n.2. A federal judge in Minnesota more recently excoriated ICE, saying it had violated nearly 100 court orders and had disobeyed more judicial directives in January alone than “some federal agencies have violated in their entire existence.” Alan Feuer, [Judge in Minnesota Says ICE Has Violated Nearly 100 Court Orders](#), N.Y. Times, Jan. 28, 2026.

²⁰ See, e.g., Sidney Blumenthal, [Abraham Lincoln’s 1859 Lesson for Some 2028 Democrat](#), The New Republic, Oct. 20, 2025; see also *Korematsu v. United States*, 323 U.S. 214 (1944), *overruled by Trump v. Hawaii*, 585 U.S. 667, 710 (2018).



protections under federal law.²¹ The label also carries social stigma that chills protected activity and justifies government overreach. False claims about terrorism therefore carry unique constitutional dangers.

That all being said, the point doesn't need to be overintellectualized. Put simply, it is deplorable for a government lawyer to seek to persuade a judge to rule against transparency and First Amendment rights based on claims of violent, organized terrorist attacks that are not real.

Conclusion

Attorney discipline "is imposed to protect the public and to safeguard the integrity of the legal system."²² In these times of rampant prosecutorial abuse, examples need to be made, and Skedzielewski is a good place to start.

For the foregoing reasons, Complainant requests that this Committee conduct a thorough investigation and impose adequate discipline upon Skedzielewski to deter similar conduct from other government attorneys.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Seth Stern".

Seth A. Stern, Esq.
Director of Advocacy
Freedom of the Press Foundation

²¹ See 18 U.S.C. § 2339B (outlawing material support for terrorist organizations); see also John Hudson, [No evidence linking Tufts student to antisemitism or terrorism, State Dept. office found](#), Wash. Post, April 13, 2025.

²² In re Lakin, 217 A.3d 716, 717 (D.C. 2019)