

An Act

ENROLLED HOUSE
BILL NO. 4077

By: Wallace of the House

and

Garvin of the Senate

An Act relating to civil procedure; amending 12 O.S. 2021, Section 2011.1, which relates to determination of frivolous claims or defenses; allowing court to make certain determinations without request; defining term; amending 12 O.S. 2021, Section 2011, which relates to sanctions for frivolous claims or defenses; authorizing court to order payment without a motion; and providing an effective date.

SUBJECT: Civil procedure

BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA:

SECTION 1. AMENDATORY 12 O.S. 2021, Section 2011.1, is amended to read as follows:

Section 2011.1 In any action not arising out of contract, ~~if requested~~ the court ~~shall~~ may, upon ruling on a motion to dismiss an action or a motion for summary judgment or subsequent to adjudication on the merits, determine whether a claim or defense asserted in the action by a nonprevailing party was frivolous or proven knowingly false. As used in this section, "frivolous" means the claim or defense was knowingly asserted in bad faith or without any rational argument based in law or facts to support the position of the litigant or to change existing law. As used in this section, "knowingly false" means the claim or defense was knowingly asserted with the intent to deceive which shall be proven by clear and convincing evidence. Upon so finding, the court shall enter an

order requiring such nonprevailing party to reimburse the prevailing party for reasonable costs, including attorney fees, incurred with respect to such claim or defense. In addition, the court may impose any sanction authorized by Section 2011 of this title.

SECTION 2. AMENDATORY 12 O.S. 2021, Section 2011, is amended to read as follows:

Section 2011.

SIGNING OF PLEADINGS

A. SIGNATURE. Every pleading, written motion, and other paper shall be signed by at least one attorney of record in the individual name of the attorney, whose Oklahoma Bar Association identification number shall be stated, or, if the party is not represented by an attorney, shall be signed by the party. Each paper shall state the address of the signer and telephone number, if any. Except when otherwise specifically provided by rule or statute, pleadings need not be verified or accompanied by affidavit. An unsigned paper shall be stricken unless the omission of the signature is corrected promptly after being called to the attention of the attorney or party.

B. REPRESENTATIONS TO COURT. By presenting to the court, whether by signing, filing, submitting, or later advocating, a pleading, written motion, or other paper, 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:

1. It is not being presented for any improper or frivolous purpose, such as to harass or to cause unnecessary delay or needless increase in the cost of litigation;

2. The 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;

3. The allegations and other factual contentions have evidentiary support or, if specifically so identified, are likely to have evidentiary support after a reasonable opportunity for further investigation or discovery; and

4. The denials of factual contentions are warranted on the evidence or, if specifically so identified, are reasonably based on a lack of information or belief.

C. SANCTIONS. If, after notice and a reasonable opportunity to respond, the court determines that subsection B of this section has been violated, the court shall, subject to the conditions stated below, impose an appropriate sanction upon the attorneys, law firms, or parties that have violated subsection B of this section or are responsible for the violation.

1. HOW INITIATED.

- a. By Motion. A motion for sanctions under this rule shall be made separately from other motions or requests and shall describe the specific conduct alleged to violate subsection B of this section. It shall be served as provided in Section 2005 of this title, but shall not be filed with or presented to the court unless, within twenty-one (21) days after service of the motion or such other period as the court may prescribe, the challenged paper, claim, defense, contention, allegation, or denial is not withdrawn or appropriately corrected. If warranted, the court may award to the party prevailing on the motion the reasonable expenses and attorneys fees incurred in presenting or opposing the motion. Absent exceptional circumstances, a law firm shall be held jointly responsible for violations committed by its partners, associates, and employees.
- b. On Court's Initiative. On its own initiative, the court may enter an order describing the specific conduct that appears to violate subsection B of this section and directing an attorney, law firm, or party to show cause why it has not violated subsection B of this section with respect thereto.

2. NATURE OF SANCTIONS; LIMITATIONS. A sanction imposed for violation of this section shall be limited to what is sufficient to deter repetition of such conduct or comparable conduct by others similarly situated. Subject to the limitations in subparagraphs a, b and c of this paragraph, the sanction may consist of, or include, directives of a nonmonetary nature, an order to pay a penalty into court, or, if ~~imposed on motion and~~ warranted for effective

deterrence, an order directing payment to the movant of some or all of the reasonable attorneys fees and other expenses incurred as a direct result of the violation.

- a. Monetary sanctions shall not be awarded against a represented party for a violation of paragraph 2 of subsection B of this section.
- b. Monetary sanctions shall not be awarded on the court's initiative unless the court issues its order to show cause before a voluntary dismissal or settlement of the claims made by or against the party which is, or whose attorneys are, to be sanctioned.
- c. Monetary sanctions shall be awarded for any violations of paragraph 1 of subsection B of this section. The sanctions shall consist of an order directing payment of reasonable costs, including attorney fees, incurred by the movant with respect to the conduct for which the sanctions are imposed. In addition, the court may impose any other sanctions authorized by this paragraph.

3. ORDER. When imposing sanctions, the court shall describe the conduct determined to constitute a violation of this section and explain the basis for the sanction imposed.

D. INAPPLICABILITY TO DISCOVERY. This section does not apply to disclosures and discovery requests, responses, objections, and motions that are subject to the provisions of Sections 3226 through 3237 of this title.

E. DEFINITION. As used in this section, "frivolous" means the action or pleading was knowingly asserted in bad faith or without any rational argument based in law or facts to support the position of the litigant or to change existing law.

SECTION 3. This act shall become effective November 1, 2022.

Passed the House of Representatives the 15th day of March, 2022.

Presiding Officer of the House
of Representatives

Passed the Senate the 27th day of April, 2022.

Presiding Officer of the Senate

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Received by the Office of the Governor this _____

day of _____, 20_____, at _____ o'clock _____ M.

By: _____

Approved by the Governor of the State of Oklahoma this _____

day of _____, 20_____, at _____ o'clock _____ M.

Governor of the State of Oklahoma

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Received by the Office of the Secretary of State this _____

day of _____, 20_____, at _____ o'clock _____ M.

By: _____