UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
BEFORE THE DIRECTOR OF THE
UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

In the Matter of	)	
	)	
Elias L. Hantula,	)	Proceeding No. D2026-20
	)	
	)	
Respondent	)	
	)	

FINAL ORDER

The Director of the Office of Enrollment and Discipline ("OED Director") for the United States Patent and Trademark Office ("USPTO" or "Office") and Mr. Elias L. Hantula ("Respondent") have submitted a Proposed Settlement Agreement ("Agreement") to the Under Secretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property and Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office ("USPTO Director") for approval.

The Agreement, which resolves all disciplinary action by the USPTO arising from the stipulated facts set forth below, is hereby approved. This Final Order sets forth the parties' stipulated facts, legal conclusions, and sanctions.

Jurisdiction

1. Respondent of Wood Ridge, New Jersey, is an attorney admitted to practice law in New York. Respondent, at all relevant times to this matter, was engaged in practice before the Office in trademark matters.

2. Respondent is subject the USPTO Rules of Professional Conduct, 37 C.F.R. § 11.101 *et seq.*

3. The USPTO Director has jurisdiction over this matter pursuant to 35 U.S.C. §§ 2(b)(2)(D) and 32 and 37 C.F.R. §§ 11.19, 11.20, 11.26, 11.32, and 11.39.

Background

The U.S. Counsel Rule

4. Foreign-domiciled trademark applicants or registrants must be represented before the USPTO by an attorney who is licensed to practice law in the United States. *See* 37 C.F.R. § 2.11(a); *Requirement of U.S. Licensed Attorney for Foreign Trademark Applicants and Registrants*, 84 Fed. Reg. 31498 (July 2, 2019) ("the U.S. Counsel Rule").

5. A policy objective of the U.S. Counsel Rule is to instill greater confidence in the public that U.S. registrations issued to foreign applicants are not subject to invalidation for reasons such as improper signatures. *See* 84 Fed. Reg. 31507.

6. The requirement for representation by a qualified U.S. attorney is necessary to enforce compliance by all foreign applicants, registrants, and parties with U.S. statutory and regulatory requirements in trademark matters. 84 Fed. Reg. 31498. It will not only aid the USPTO in its efforts to improve and preserve the integrity of the U.S. trademark register, but it will also ensure that foreign applicants, registrants, and parties are assisted only by authorized practitioners who are subject to the USPTO's disciplinary rules. *Id.*

7. The USPTO has published ample information about the U.S. Counsel Rule. *See, e.g., Requirement of U.S. Licensed Attorney for Foreign Trademark Applicants and Registrants*, 84 Fed Reg, 31498 (Final Rule) (July 2, 2019); 37 C.F.R. § 2.11 (requirement for representation); Trademark Manual of Examining Procedure § 601 (Requirement for Representation Based on Domicile of Mark Owner).

8. At all relevant times, Respondent had access to information concerning the U.S. Counsel Rule, its policy objectives, and its necessity.

USPTO Trademark Signature Rules and TMEP Direction

9. At all relevant times, the USPTO trademark signature rules required that all signatures be personally entered by the named signatory and that a person electronically signing a document through the Trademark Electronic Application System ("TEAS") must personally enter any combination of letters, numbers, spaces, and/or punctuation marks that he or she has adopted as a signature, placed between two forward slash ("/") symbols in the signature block on the electronic submission. *See* 37 C.F.R. § 2.193(a) and (c), and 37 C.F.R. § 11.18(a).

10. Trademark applications contain declarations that are signed under penalty of perjury, with false statements being subject to punishment under 18 U.S.C. § 1001. The USPTO relies on such declarations signed under penalty of perjury in trademark applications in the course of examining trademark applications and issuing registrations.

11. The USPTO publishes online and regularly updates its Trademark Manual of Examining Procedure ("TMEP") (https://fqt-tmep.etc.uspto.gov/RDMS/TMEP/current). The TMEP provides trademark practitioners, *inter alia*, with a reference work on the practices and procedures relative to prosecution of applications to register marks in the USPTO.

12. At all relevant times, unequivocal direction from the USPTO identified the proscription against any person other than the named signatory signing electronically trademark documents filed with the USPTO:

All documents must be properly signed. 37 C.F.R. §§ 2.193(a), 11.18(a).

> The person(s) identified as the signatory must personally sign the printed form or personally enter the signatory's electronic signature, either directly on the trademark electronic filing system's form or in the emailed form. 37 C.F.R. § 2.193(a), (d).
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> A person may not delegate their authority to sign, and no person may sign or enter the name of another. *See In re Stelcore Mgmt. Servs., LLC*, 2025 Commr. Pat. LEXIS 3, at *5 (Dir USPTO 2025) (sanctions); *See In re Zhang*, 2021 TTAB LEXIS 465, at *10, *13 (Dir USPTO 2021) (sanctions); *In re Dermahose Inc.*, Ser. No. 76585901, 2007 TTAB LEXIS 25, at *9 (2007); *In re Cowan*, Reg. No. 1225389, 1990 Commr. Pat. LEXIS 24, at *6 (Comm'r Pats. 1990).
>
> Just as signing the name of another person on paper does not serve as the signature of the person whose name is written, typing the electronic signature of another person is not a valid signature by that person.
>
> Similarly, another person may not use document-signing software to create or generate the electronic signature of the named signatory.

TMEP § 611.01(c) (November 2025) (paragraph spacing added).[1]

13. A trademark submission that is signed by a person other than the named signatory is improperly executed and cannot be relied upon to support registration. *See In re Yusha Zhang*, 2021 Commr. Pat. LEXIS 2 at *10 (Dir. USPTO 2021); *Ex parte Hipkins*, Appeal No. 90-2250, 1991 Pat. App. LEXIS 14, at *10-13 (BPAI 1991); *In re Cowan*, Reg. No. 1225389, 1990 Commr. Pat. LEXIS 24, at *5-6 (Comm'r Pats. 1990).

14. A signature that does not meet the "personally signed" or "personally entered" requirements, *see* 37 C.F.R. §§ 2.193(a), (f), 11.18(a), "may jeopardize the validity of [an] application or registration." 37 C.F.R. § 2.193(f).

15. The USPTO trademark signature rules are substantive requirements, not mere "technical" ones. *See In re Stelcore Management Services LLC*, 2025 Comm'r. Pat. at *3 (Final Order for Sanctions June 13, 2025).

16. "Submitting a document that includes false, misleading, fictitious, or fraudulent information or representations violates 37 C.F.R. § 11.18(b)(1). This includes, for example, false or misleading domicile information, attorney information, signatory information (*e.g.*, where the named signatory did not personally enter his or her signature on the document), applicant information, or claims of use (or intent to use). Submitting a document without undertaking a reasonable inquiry into the factual basis for the averments, without evidentiary support, in an effort to circumvent USPTO Rules, or coupled with other rule or Terms of Use violations

[1] Previous versions published in November 2024, May 2024, November 2023, July 2022, July 2021, and October 2018 (with similar language).

constitutes an improper purpose and violates 37 C.F.R. §11.18(b)(2)." *In re Stelcore Management Services, LLC, supra* at *6.

17. At all relevant times, the TMEP was available to Respondent and, as a practitioner who represents trademark clients before the USPTO, he should have known the requirements of 37 C.F.R. § 2.193 and the direction provided by TMEP § 611.01(c).

USPTO.gov Accounts

18. At all relevant times, a USPTO.gov account was required for trademark documents to be electronically filed with the USPTO via TEAS.

19. At all relevant times, creation of a USPTO.gov account required acceptance of the Terms of Use for USPTO websites ("Website Terms of Use"),[2] including the section titled "Account management" that requires the individual account holder to accept responsibility for maintaining the confidentiality of their account information and for all activities that occur under their account, and for notifying the USPTO of any unauthorized use of their account information, and also warns that the USPTO may terminate the account for sharing of accounts and/or account passwords that are intended for the sole use of the individual who opened the account.

20. On January 8, 2022, the USPTO made an identity verification service available to trademark practitioners whereby practitioners also assented to the terms of a USPTO Trademark Verified USPTO.gov Account Agreement. More specifically, to obtain a USPTO.gov account, the account holder must agree to various terms of service outlined in the USPTO Trademark Verified USPTO.gov Account Agreement, including that the account holder will not permit others to use the account and will not permit the account to be used in connection with the unauthorized practice of law.

21. The USPTO Trademark Verified USPTO.gov Account Agreement proscribes use of the USPTO.gov account by any other person:

> I understand that my account is for my sole use and I will not permit others to use the trademark verified USPTO.gov account login credentials issued to me and I will take reasonable steps to prevent others from learning my account login information. I will promptly notify the USPTO if I become aware that the login credentials issued to me have been used by others. I understand that sharing my account login credentials may result in temporary or permanent suspension of my account privileges.
>
> ***
>
> I understand that a trademark verified USPTO.gov account is not transferable to any other individual or entity. A trademark verified USPTO.gov account is solely for use by the individual whose verified identity is associated with the account.

[2] Available at: https://www.uspto.gov/terms-use-uspto-websites.

22. USPTO.gov account holders are reminded of their responsibilities upon every login to their USPTO.gov account wherein they must certify their acceptance of the USPTO's Website Terms of Use.

Sponsored Attorney Support Staff – Acceptable Use and Use (In Part, July 2022)

23. The USPTO Trademark Verified USPTO.gov Account Agreement (2022) provides:

> (ii) I am employed or retained by the account sponsor or the law firm or company where we are both employed, and (iii) I am subject to direct oversight and supervision of the account sponsor.
>
> I agree that my access to USPTO systems that may only be accessed by the holder of a trademark verified USPTO.gov account may not extend beyond those duties performed under the direction and control of a sponsoring attorney. If a sponsoring attorney ceases practice before the USPTO for any reason, I will cease any access granted from that attorney.

Attorney-Acceptable Use and Sponsorship of Attorney Support Staff (February 2024)

24. The USPTO Trademark Verified USPTO.gov Account Agreement (February 2024) provides in part:

> I understand that I am authorized to grant USPTO.gov account sponsorship to attorney support staff who are directly employed or retained by me, my company, or my law firm and who work under my direct supervision, and that I may remove USPTO.gov account sponsorship of the attorney support staff whom I have sponsored at any time. I agree that I will immediately remove sponsorship from any paralegal or support account for any individual no longer employed or supervised by me. I will not attempt to sponsor any other individuals or organizations, including any foreign or domestic company, group, client, agent, attorney or other practitioner.
>
> As a sponsoring attorney, I understand that I am personally, professionally, and ethically responsible for the conduct of each attorney support staff when using a sponsored USPTO.gov account. I will take reasonable steps to ensure that each sponsored attorney support staff is familiar with the terms of this Agreement and with relevant laws, regulations, and policies of the USPTO with respect to the duties to which their access pertains. I will take reasonable steps to ensure that each sponsored attorney support staff's access and use of USPTO system is consistent with the tasks assigned to that individual. Such reasonable steps include prompt removal of sponsorship when appropriate, including where the individual is no longer under my

employ and/or supervision. I will immediately remove sponsorship of the USPTO.gov account for any attorney support staff whom I have reason to believe has abused or misused any USPTO system, including but not limited to knowingly submitting false statements or signatures, and I will immediately report the misuse or abuse to the USPTO. I understand that failure to supervise use of accounts by my support staff may result in any of the following, but not limited to, my being referred to the Office of Enrollment and Discipline and/or revocation of my ability to sponsor additional accounts…

As an attorney, I may only sponsor attorney support staff under my supervision, employed or retained by my individual law practice, law firm, or as employees of the same company as myself. I will not attempt to sponsor any other individuals or organizations, including any foreign or domestic company, group, client agent, attorney or other practitioner. In addition to the identity verification required by the USPTO, as a sponsoring attorney, I understand that I am responsible for confirming the identity of any person whom I sponsor, and understand that this information is subject to the terms of Section.

Joint Stipulated Facts

25. On February 14, 2011, Respondent was admitted to practice law in the State of New York (Registration Number 4896890) and, at all relevant times, has been an attorney in good standing.

26. Respondent has practiced trademark law since 2016.

27. Initially, Respondent obtained clients via word of mouth and used websites such as Upwork and Fiverr.

28. Since 2022, Respondent has received more than 100 foreign trademark matter referrals for trademark legal services on behalf of foreign-domiciled clients from Alina Ghorghanyan, Puneet Sharma, Jonathan Lee, Khai Tran, Uroosh Khan, Samson Adebisi, and Akash Prasad. He also received referrals from Accolade IP, a Hong Kong law firm, and AZ-Helper, a Taiwanese company. Currently, Respondent accepts referrals of foreign-domiciled clients from three referring entities/individuals: Accolade IP; AZ-Helper Co., LTD; and Khai Tran.

29. From 2022 to 2025, Respondent sponsored twenty-one (21) USPTO.gov accounts. Three of the USPTO.gov accounts were held by the same individual purportedly because the individual could not access earlier generated accounts.

30. The sponsored individuals were not under Respondent's direct supervision. Nor were they employed or retained by his law firm.

31. Respondent acknowledged that he did not take reasonable steps to ensure that each sponsored individual was familiar with the terms of the agreement and the relevant regulations and laws. He acknowledged that he did not always adequately supervise them.

32. Respondent discovered that persons other than himself had entered his signature on certain applications and other trademark documents filed with the USPTO using the sponsored accounts. Many of the filings did not use Respondent's email address as the correspondence address, and, therefore, he did not receive the associated filing receipts.

33. After discovering the impermissibly signed documents, Respondent *sua sponte* informed the USPTO about the impermissible filings as early as 2023. Specifically, he informed the Deputy Commissioner for Trademark Examination Policy of the unauthorized filings and provided an itemized list of those filings. He did so prior to OED beginning its investigation of his conduct.

34. As of early as 2024, Respondent reduced the number of sponsored USPTO.gov accounts to five. As of 2025, Respondent reduced the number of sponsored USPTO.gov accounts to two. Prior to OED beginning its investigation, Respondent ceased to sponsor any new USPTO.gov accounts.

Additional Considerations

35. Respondent has not been previously disciplined by the USPTO, and he represents that he has never been the subject of professional discipline by any other jurisdiction.

36. Respondent fully cooperated with OED's investigation, e.g., by participating in an online interview with OED; by providing timely, candid, non-evasive responses to requests for information; and by entering into tolling agreements to ensure that a robust evidentiary record was fully developed.

37. Respondent has also taken USPTO professional education and training courses regarding signature rules, ethical obligations in trademark prosecution, best practices for client communication, and sponsored account usage.

38. Respondent has specifically reviewed the following documents and video-recorded presentations and will take further training as follows:

a. Respondent has reviewed the following written documents:

- Protect Against Trademark Scams – Prevent scams/ Response to scams/ Latest scams (https://www.uspto.gov/trademarks/protect);
- United States Patent and Trademark Office Trademark Verified USPTO.gov Account Agreement; and
- USPTO trademark Signature Rules.

b. Respondent has watched a total of five (5) video-recorded presentations including:

- Trademark practitioners: Avoid attorney scams and bad behavior (https://www.uspto.gov/learning-and-resources/uspto-videos/attorney-practitioners-avoid-attorney-scams-and-bad-behavior); and

- Trademark enforcement: Avoiding trademark scams (https://www.uspto.gov/learning-and-resources/uspto-videos/trademark-enforcement-avoiding-trademark-scams).

c. Respondent shall watch the following trademark video-recorded presentations:

- USPTO Hour: Combating trademark fraud and threats | USPTO;

- USPTO Hour: Trademark "Change Address or Representation" form authorization updates; and

- USPTO Hour: Trademark pendency and preventing fraudulent filings | USPTO.

d. Respondent shall review disciplinary decisions involving the U.S. Counsel Rule at the Office of Enrollment and Discipline Reading Room accessible at: https://foiadocuments.uspto.gov/oed.

e. Respondent shall continue to conduct bi-weekly searches for unauthorized submissions using or associated with his information and/or signature and filed notifications with the USPTO regarding unauthorized submissions.

39. Respondent is contrite and now acknowledges and understands the following about the USPTO trademark signature rules:

a. All documents must be properly signed. 37 C.F.R. §§ 2.193(a), 11.18(a);

b. The person(s) identified as the signatory must personally sign the printed form or personally enter the signatory's electronic signature, either directly on the trademark electronic filing system's form or in the emailed form. 37 C.F.R. § 2.193(a), (d);

c. A person may not delegate their authority to sign, and no person may sign or enter the name of another. *See In re Stelcore Mgmt. Servs., LLC*, 2025 Commr. Pat. LEXIS 3, at *5 (Dir USPTO 2025) (sanctions); *In re Zhang*, 2021 TTAB LEXIS 465, at *10, *13 (Dir USPTO 2021) (sanctions); *In re Dermahose Inc.*, Ser. No. 76585901, 2007 TTAB LEXIS 25, at *9 (2007); *In*

re Cowan, Reg. No. 1225389, 1990 Commr. Pat. LEXIS 24, at *6 (Comm'r Pats. 1990);

d. Just as signing the name of another person on paper does not serve as the signature of the person whose name is written, typing the electronic signature of another person is not a valid signature by that person; and

e. Similarly, another person may not use document-signing software to create or generate the electronic signature of the named signatory.

40. Further, Respondent now acknowledges and understands the following regarding the USPTO-sponsored accounts:

a. The USPTO Trademark Verified USPTO.gov Account Agreement authorizes a sponsoring attorney to grant USPTO.gov account sponsorship to attorney support staff who are directly employed or retained by the sponsoring attorney, sponsoring attorney's company, or sponsoring attorney's law firm and who work under sponsoring attorney's direct supervision;

b. A sponsoring attorney understands that they are personally, professionally, and ethically responsible for the conduct of each attorney support staff when using a sponsored USPTO.gov account;

c. A sponsoring attorney will take reasonable steps to ensure that each sponsored attorney support staff is familiar with the terms of this Agreement and with relevant laws, regulations, and policies of the USPTO with respect to the duties to which their access pertains; and

d. A sponsoring attorney will immediately remove sponsorship of the USPTO.gov account for any attorney support staff whom they have reason to believe has abused or misused any USPTO system.

Joint Legal Conclusions

41. Respondent acknowledges that, based on the information contained in the joint stipulated facts, above, Respondent's acts and omissions violated the following provisions of the USPTO Rules of Professional Conduct:

a. 37 C.F.R § 11.101 (not providing competent representation to a client) by, *inter alia*, (i) not understanding and/or following the sponsorship and revocation provisions of the USPTO's Trademark Verified USPTO.gov Account Agreement, specifically by sponsoring USPTO.gov accounts for unauthorized individuals, by sponsoring an unreasonable number of individuals without adequate oversight such that other persons inserted Respondent's signature on documents filed with the USPTO; and (ii) not ensuring that sponsored individuals understood and adhered to the

provisions of the USPTO Trademark Verified USPTO.gov Account Agreement and the USPTO Website Terms of Use;

b. 37 C.F.R. § 11.103 (not acting with reasonable diligence) by, *inter alia*, failing to take reasonable steps to acquire knowledge of the USPTO Trademark Verified USPTO.gov Account Agreement and the USPTO Website Terms of Use such that he sponsored USPTO.gov accounts for unauthorized individuals; and

c. 37 C.F.R. 11.804(d) (engaging in conduct prejudicial to the integrity of the federal trademark registration process) by, *inter alia*, practicing before the USPTO in trademark matters while: (i) not understanding and not taking steps to understand his Trademark Account Agreement and the USPTO Website Terms of Use; (ii) sponsoring USPTO.gov accounts for unauthorized individuals; and (iii) failing to adequately supervise sponsored individuals.

Agreed-Upon Sanction

42. Respondent has freely and voluntarily agreed, and it is hereby ORDERED that:

a. Respondent shall be, and hereby is, publicly reprimanded;

b. Respondent is placed on probation for twelve (12) months beginning on the date of this Final Order;

c.

(1) If the OED Director is of the good-faith opinion that Respondent, during his probationary period, failed to comply with any provision of the Agreement, this Final Order, any of the conditions of his probation, or any provision of the USPTO Rules of Professional Conduct, the OED Director shall:

(A) issue to Respondent an Order to Show Cause why the USPTO Director should not enter an order immediately suspending the Respondent for up to two (2) months for the violations set forth in the Joint Legal Conclusions, above;

(B) send the Order to Show Cause to Respondent at the last address of record Respondent furnished to the OED Director pursuant to subparagraph h., below;

(C) grant Respondent fifteen (15) days to respond to the Order to Show Cause; and

(2) In the event that after the 15-day period for response and consideration of the response, if any, received from Respondent, the OED Director continues to be of the good-faith opinion that Respondent, during Respondent's probationary period, failed to comply with the USPTO Rules of Professional Conduct, this Final Order, or any provisions of the Agreement, including any of the above conditions of his probation set forth herein, or any provision of the USPTO Rules of Professional Conduct, the OED Director shall:

(A) deliver to the USPTO Director: (i) the Order to Show Cause; (ii) Respondent's response to the Order to Show Cause, if any; and (iii) argument and evidence supporting the OED Director's position;

(B) request that the USPTO Director enter an order immediately suspending Respondent for up to two (2) months for the violations set forth in the Joint Legal Conclusions above; and

(C) send the documents delivered to the USPTO Director to Respondent at the last address of record Respondent furnished to the OED Director pursuant to subparagraph h., below;

d. Nothing herein shall prevent the OED Director from seeking discrete discipline (*e.g.*, via 37 C.F.R. §§ 11.24, 11.25, 11.26, 11.27, and 11.32) for any misconduct that formed the basis for an Order to Show Cause issued pursuant to the preceding subparagraph;

e. In the event the Respondent seeks a review of any action taken pursuant to subparagraph c, above, —including action by the USPTO Director suspending Respondent for up to two (2) months— such review shall not operate to postpone or otherwise hold in abeyance the suspension;

f. While Respondent is on probation, Respondent shall, at least on a bi-weekly basis, (1) search the USPTO's online trademark search system (currently located at https://tmsearch.uspto.gov/search/search-information) for trademark applications identifying him as the attorney of record, using the search phrase format AT: firstname AND AT: lastname AND FD: [YYYYMMDD TO YYYYMMDD]; and (2) promptly inform in writing the USPTO Office of Trademark Examination Policy of each trademark document identifying his as the attorney of record that was filed without his knowledge or consent;

g. While Respondent is on probation, Respondent shall, at least on a monthly basis, submit a written report to the OED Director stating that he has completed the bi-weekly searches of the online trademark search system, and, as applicable, (1) stating that he identified no applications or other trademark filings in which he was named as the attorney of record that

were not made by him or without his knowledge and consent or (2) providing copies of correspondence sent to the USPTO Office of Trademark Examination Policy as described in the preceding subparagraph;

h. As a condition of his probation, Respondent shall (1) notify the OED Director in writing within seven (7) days of the date of this Final Order of a postal address, and email address, and a telephone number to be used by the OED Director for purposes of corresponding and communicating with Respondent regarding subparagraph c., above; and (2) notify the OED Director in writing of any change in his postal address, the email address, and the telephone number to be used by the OED Director for purposes of corresponding and communicating with Respondent regarding subparagraph c., above, within thirty (30) days of the date of any such change;

i. As a condition of his probation, Respondent shall prior to the termination of his probation, provide to the OED Director a written declaration, affidavit, or statement in compliance with 28 U.S.C. § 1746 signed by Respondent stating that he has reviewed the following recorded presentations and slides for the following:

   - USPTO Hour: Combating trademark fraud and threats | USPTO (https://www.uspto.gov/about-us/events/uspto-hour-trademark-pendency-preventing-fraudulent-filings);

   - USPTO Hour: Trademark "Change Address or Representation" form authorization updates (https://www.uspto.gov/about-us/events/uspto-hour-trademark-change-address-or-representation-form-authorization-updates); and

   - USPTO Hour: Trademark pendency and preventing fraudulent filings | USPTO (https://www.uspto.gov/about-us/events/uspto-hour-trademark-pendency-and-preventing-fraudulent-filings);

j. Respondent shall cooperate fully with the USPTO in any present or future inquiry into any other third-party entities (*e.g.*, foreign representatives or foreign associates) or person(s) with whom Respondent worked, or was solicited to work with, in connection with his practice before the USPTO in trademark matters;

k. The OED Director shall electronically publish this Final Order at the OED's electronic FOIA Reading Room, which is publicly accessible through the Office's website at: https://foiadocuments.uspto.gov/oed/;

l. The OED Director shall publish a notice in the *Official Gazette* that is materially consistent with the following:

Notice of Public Reprimand and Probation

This notice concerns Mr. Elias Hantula, of Wood Ridge, New Jersey, who is an attorney in good standing in the State of New York (Registration Number 4896890), who engaged in practice before the Office in trademark matters. Mr. Hantula is hereby publicly reprimanded for violating 37 C.F.R. §§ 11.101, 11.103, and 11.804(d) predicated on impermissible sponsoring of USPTO.gov accounts for his trademark practice and not adequately supervising non-practitioner assistants. He is also placed on probation for twelve (12) months.

In connection with his representation of foreign-domiciled trademark clients before the USPTO as a U.S. licensed attorney under the USPTO's U.S. Counsel Rule, Mr. Hantula sponsored twenty-one USPTO.gov attorney support staff accounts for nineteen individuals (three USPTO.gov accounts were associated with the same individual). Most were not authorized to be sponsored because the individuals were not directly supervised and employed or retained by Mr. Hantula. Further, Mr. Hantula did not adequately monitor the use of the sponsored accounts. Thereafter, impermissibly signed and filed trademark documents for foreign-domiciled trademark applicants were filed under Mr. Hantula's name and credentials. Mr. Hantula represented to OED that many trademark applications were filed under his name and bar credentials without his knowledge or authorization.

After discovering the impermissibly signed documents, Mr. Hantula *sua sponte* informed the USPTO about the impermissible filings as early as 2023. Specifically, he informed the Deputy Commissioner for Trademark Examination Policy of the unauthorized filings and provided an itemized list of those filings. Mr. Hantula did so prior to OED beginning its investigation of his conduct.

As a result of the above misconduct, Mr. Hantula agrees that he violated the following provisions of the USPTO Rules of Professional Conduct: 37 C.F.R. §§ 11.101 (practitioner shall provide competent representation to a client); 11.103 (practitioner shall act with reasonable diligence); and 11.804(d) (practitioner shall not engage in conduct that is prejudicial to the federal trademark registration system).

The terms and conditions of a USPTO Trademark Verified

USPTO.gov Account Agreement—including a practitioner's acceptable use of his or her own account and the requirements for sponsoring support staff (*e.g.*, who may be properly sponsored, monitoring the use of sponsored accounts, removal of sponsorship, and reporting abuse of sponsored accounts)—are clear, and a practitioner who is engaged in practice before the USPTO in trademark matters are to be aware of such terms and conditions and are to comply with them. Indeed, a sponsoring practitioner is personally, professionally, and ethically responsible for the conduct of each attorney support staff acting under the practitioner's supervision when using a sponsored USPTO.gov account, and the USPTO Director has issued numerous orders imposing discipline on trademark practitioners who violated the USPTO Rules of Professional Conduct based on not complying with the terms and conditions of USPTO Trademark Verified USPTO.gov Account Agreement. *See. e.g., In re Benjamin Alan Balser Sr.,* Proceeding D2025-30 (Dec. 19, 2025 Final Order); *In re Maria G. Worley,* Proceeding No. D2025-11 (Aug. 14, 2025 Final Order)*; In re Evelyn Ufomadu,* Proceeding No. D2025-20 (June 25, 2025 Final Order) *In re Okeke,* Proceeding No. D2024-18 (USPTO Jan. 6, 2025); and *In re Haffner,* Proceeding No. D2023-35 (USPTO May 21, 2024).

Trademark practitioners should be mindful that there is an obligation to understand the USPTO trademark signature rules, adequately supervise non-attorneys, and fulfill obligations under 37 C.F.R. § 11.18 to conduct an inquiry reasonable under the circumstances in support of factual assertions made in trademark documents presented to the USPTO.

This action is the result of a settlement agreement between Mr. Hantula and the OED Director pursuant to the provisions of 35 U.S.C. §§ 2(b)(2)(D) and 32, and 37 C.F.R. §§ 11.19, 11.20, and 11.26. Disciplinary decisions involving practitioners are posted for public reading at the Office of Enrollment and Discipline Reading Room accessible at: https://foiadocuments.uspto.gov/oed;

m. Nothing in the Agreement or this Final Order shall prevent the Office from considering the record of this disciplinary proceeding, including this Final Order: (1) when addressing any further complaint or evidence of the same or similar misconduct concerning Respondent brought to the attention of the Office; (2) in any future disciplinary proceeding against Respondent (i) as an aggravating factor to be taken into consideration in determining any discipline to be imposed, and/or (ii) to rebut any statement or representation by or on Respondent's behalf;

n. Respondent waives all rights to seek reconsideration of this Final Order under 37 C.F.R. § 11.56, waives the right to have this Final Order reviewed under 37 C.F.R. § 11.57, and waives the right otherwise to appeal or challenge this Final Order in any manner; and

o. Each party shall each bear their own costs incurred to date and in carrying out the terms of the Agreement and this Final Order.

TRICIA CHOE

Digitally signed by TRICIA CHOE
Date: 2026.05.07 09:26:40 -04'00'

Tricia Choe
Associate General Counsel for General Law
United States Patent and Trademark Office

Date

on delegated authority by

John A. Squires
Under Secretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property and
Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing Final Order was sent, on this day, to the parties in the manner indicated below:

Via first-class certified mail, return receipt requested and email:

Mr. Elias Hantula
492 Wood Ridge Avenue
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[redacted]
Respondent

Via email:

Lena Munasifi
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Counsel for OED Director

5/7/2026
Date

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