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Katherine M. Keefe
Clerk of the Circuit Court

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IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE TWENTY-SECOND JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
MCHENRY COUNTY, ILLINOIS

PAUL DULBERG, Plaintiff, vs. THE LAW OFFICES OF THOMAS J. POPOVICH, P.C., and HANS MAST, Defendants.	)	No. 17LA000377

REPLY IN SUPPORT OF DEFENDANTS' MOTION TO DISMISS PLAINTIFF'S FIRST AMENDED COMPLAINT AT LAW

Defendants, LAW OFFICES OF THOMAS J. POPOVICH, P.C., and HANS MAST, by and through their attorneys, GEORGE K. FLYNN, and CLAUSEN MILLER P.C., pursuant to 735 ILCS 5/2-615, submit this Reply in Support of Defendants' Motion to Dismiss Plaintiff's First Amended Complaint at Law with prejudice, and state as follows:

I. INTRODUCTION

Dulberg's Response misses the point, and adds facts and theories that are not contained in his pleading. He now asserts that Mast failed to become familiar with the law of "chainsaw ownership liability" (Res. p. 4, ¶10), and that Mast "could have considered" the law as to ultrahazardous circumstances and the strict liability of the homeowners. But these facts and theories are not plead, and cannot be inferred from his First Amended Complaint. Moreover, what potential theories of recovery "could have been considered" [by a lawyer being sued for malpractice] is not the standard. Dulberg must ultimately demonstrate that he would have prevailed against the landowners in the case within the case. Instead, Dulberg fails to plead, or

now argue, facts and law that would have imposed liability upon a homeowner for an accident which occurred when their adult son and his buddy were trimming a tree in the backyard. There is no allegation that the McGuire's were supervising the work, or that they owed some duty to supervise. Dulberg does not allege what they did wrong, only that they were liable.

II. DULBERG FAILS TO ADDRESS PROXIMATE CAUSE-THAT HE WOULD HAVE PREVAILED BUT FOR MALPRACTICE

A fundamental omission from Dulberg's pleading and his argument, is that he has not plead (and will be unable to establish), that he would have prevailed in the underlying case against the landowners. The cases upon which he relies do not support his contentions.

A. Negligence

Dulberg's pleading still relies only on conclusions about the potential liability of the landowners, and not facts or law. The case upon which he relies for the proposition that the landowners would have been liable to him (had he not settled with them) is unavailing, and simply sets out elements of premises liability law in Illinois. Dulberg cites *Rhodes v. Illinois Cent. Gulf R.R.* 172 Ill. 2d, 213, 228 (1996) to inform the court that the "duty owed by a premises owner or occupier to an invitee or a licensee is that of "reasonable care under the circumstances regarding the state of the premises or acts done or omitted on them." But he fails to plead facts here about how the McGuire's breached any duty to him, or how they did not use reasonable care under the circumstances when Dulberg volunteered to assist their adult son in trimming a tree. What did they do wrong?

Notably, Rhodes involved an alleged wrongful death of an intoxicated trespasser on the property of the defendant railroad. A Chicago police officer found the deceased laying on a bench on the defendant's property. The police took him to the hospital where he eventually died. The plaintiff's estate was awarded a significant verdict at trial by the jury. The Illinois Supreme

Court reversed and remanded, ordering a new trial with instructions consistent with its holdings (and instructing the jury to determine whether the decedent was a trespasser or invitee). The case is simply not on point.

B. <u>Strict Liability</u>

For the first time, Dulberg raises in his Response (p. 4, ¶11) an allegation that "had MAST reviewed the law on premises liability, he could have considered the law as to ultrahazardous circumstances and the strict liability of the homeowners." He then cites to a case, apparently to reference one element of strict liability analysis (vis a vis landowners). But *Miller v. Civil Constructors, Inc.* 272 Ill. App. 3d 263, 266 (2nd Dist. 1995) is not helpful to him. In *Miller*, the plaintiff appealed the dismissal of his strict liability claim against a construction company and a city, after he was hit by a stray bullet which ricocheted during the course of firearm target practice at a nearby gravel pit. The appellate court affirmed the dismissal. "Under the circumstances presented, we hold as a matter of law that the discharge of firearms is not an ultrahazardous activity which would support plaintiff's strict liability claims." *(Miller* at *265). Dulberg fails to analyze Miller and explain how it is applicable here, which it is not.

One attorney may handle a case differently from another attorney, but these differences do not amount to a breach of the standard of care. In a legal malpractice case in Illinois, more is needed than a suggestion that an attorney "could have considered" a particular theory, and did not. A legal malpractice plaintiff must plead and prove that he would have been successful in the undertaking. Here, Dulberg must plead that he would have been successful in prosecuting a strict liability case. The fact is, he cannot support the factual or legal assertion that backyard chainsaw tree-trimming is a strict liability proposition. Moreover, his bare allegations that a liability expert should have been retained, as a red herring. There is no factual allegation as to why such an expert mattered.

III. DULBERG FALLS SHORT IN ALLEGING THAT HE WAS MISLED

Dulberg fails to specify how he was misled. Even if Mast made a mistake about the McGuire's insurance coverage, it made no difference, and there is no damage. Dulberg cannot explain why $300,000 versus $100,000 in coverage made any difference, when he settled for $5000. Had the he settled for $99,999.99, his argument for damages may be colorable. In any event, he alleges no facts in support of the allegation that facts were "concealed." His other allegations that Mast concealed facts, include a quantum leap, now arguing in the Response at p. 5, ¶15, that Mast concealed facts relating to the explanation of liability law and what type of duty the McGuires's owed. This is absurd, given that Dulberg still has not alleged what the duty was, how it was breached, or in laymen's terms—what the McGuire's did wrong.

IV. CONCLUSION

WHEREFORE, Defendants, LAW OFFICES OF THOMAS J. POPOVICH, P.C., and HANS MAST, pursuant to 735 ILCS 5/2-615 respectfully request this Honorable Court dismiss Plaintiff's Complaint First Amended Complaint at Law with prejudice, and for any further relief this Court deems fair and proper.

/s/ George K. Flynn

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

The undersigned hereby certifies that the foregoing document was caused to be served through the McHenry County I2File Efile System and by email on the 31st day of August, 2018, addressed to counsel of record as follows:

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Under penalties as provided by law pursuant to Section 1-109 of the Code of Civil Procedure, the undersigned certifies that the statements set forth in this Certificate of Service are true and correct.