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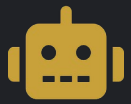
Small Claims: When AI Joins the Dispute



Educational information only — not legal advice for any specific situation.



2001: A Space Odyssey

"I'm sorry, Dave. I'm afraid I can't do that."

Who here has had an AI tool give a confident, wrong answer? Strawberry?

01

Utah small claims basics

Limits, fees, who can appear, and the process

Small claims by the numbers

$20,000

Claim limit since Jan 1, 2025 (rises to $25,000 on Jan 1, 2030)

$60–$185

Filing fee, depending on the amount claimed

28 days

To appeal; the appeal is a brand-new trial in district court

Money only: small claims judges can't order anyone to do or stop doing something. Evictions go to district court.

Who can stand up for your company?

Utah Rule of Small Claims Procedure 13

- **The party itself** (an owner who is an individual)
- **A Utah-licensed attorney**
- **An employee** of the party
- **An unpaid other person,** only with the court's express approval
- **Third-party managers:** if you're not the owner's employee, ask us before you appear



How a case moves in online dispute courts



File & serve

File the affidavit and serve the defendant



Log in

Plaintiff: within 7 days or dismissed. Defendant: within 14 days of service or default



Negotiate

14-day settlement window with a facilitator



Trial

If no deal, trial is set about 7–21 days later



Appeal

Notice within 28 days; new trial in district court

Missing the login deadline is the #1 way landlords lose cases they should win.

The deposit case clock: Utah Code 57-17



Possession returned

Tenant vacates and returns possession. The clock starts.

Return or itemize

Send the balance plus a written itemization. Email or text works if the tenant provided it (H.B. 480, 2025).

Tenant's notice

Tenant may serve the statutory notice to provide a deposit disposition.

Last chance

Comply, or owe the full deposit + prepaid rent + $100. Fees and costs if bad faith.

Evidence

- **The signed lease and addenda**
  with all signers
- **The tenant ledger**
  every charge and payment
- **Move-in and move-out checklists**
  signed and dated
- **Invoices and receipts**
  for each deduction
- **Original photos and video**
  keep the original files and their date data
- **The itemization and proof of delivery**
  showing it went out within 30 days

02

When AI joins the dispute

Fake citations, deepfakes, and your own AI use

Spotting an AI-written demand letter

Wrong law, confident tone

Out-of-state terms, or Utah statutes that don't exist ("57-17-7 requires a 15-day refund").

Invented penalties

"Triple damages" or dollar amounts that aren't in Utah's deposit statute.

Oddly specific case cites

Real-sounding case names with exact citations that you can't find anywhere.

Too polished, too generic

Perfect formatting, legal buzzwords, but no facts about your property.

Deepfake photos: protect your evidence

The risk

- Photos can be altered in seconds on a phone
- A tenant may claim your photos were faked
- Federal Evidence Rule 707 for AI evidence was sent back for revision in June 2026

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Your defense

- Keep the original files, not screenshots
- Use an inspection app that time-stamps
- Same angles at move-in and move-out
- Have the employee who took them testify

Authentic originals are your best answer to "those photos are fake."

Your own AI policy

A human checks everything

No AI-drafted legal notice, demand, or court filing goes out without review.

Protect tenant data

Don't paste SSNs, ledgers, or applications into public AI tools.

Verify every citation

Statutes at le.utah.gov; cases on Justia or Google Scholar.

Watch pricing tools

DOJ's RealPage settlement (approved 2026) limits use of nonpublic rent data.

YOU MAKE THE CALL

The ChatGPT demand letter

A former tenant emails: "Under Utah Code 57-17-7, you had 15 days to refund my $1,200 deposit. You owe me triple damages of $3,600 or I'll file in small claims." You mailed an itemization on day 22 showing $700 in documented damage.

A Pay $3,600 to make it go away

B Reply with the 30-day rule and your itemization

C Ignore it

Takeaways

- **Know the clock:** 30 days to itemize, 5 business days after a tenant's notice
- **Verify, don't panic:** AI letters often cite law that doesn't exist
- **Send the right person:** an employee or an attorney
- **Guard your originals:** authentic files beat deepfake claims
- **Log in on time:** ODR deadlines are strict
- **Write an AI policy:** a human reviews everything

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Questions?

Next up at 11:00: State and Federal Laws Affecting Rental Housing