



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on September 2, 2026

RFK Jr.'s "Gold-standard Science" Runs Into Another AI Citation Scandal

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. spent years denouncing the federal health establishment. And as Health and Human Services (HHS) secretary, he promised to replace its failures with "[gold-standard science](#)."

Now his department appears to have replaced some of the science with AI hallucinations.

Earlier in August, a federal judge rebuked the Department of Health and Human Services for using scientific citations that either do not exist or do not support the claims attached to them. The citations appeared in official funding notices used to reshape the federal Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program (TPP).



AP Images
Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

The episode is especially damaging because it is not the first. In 2025, the Kennedy-chaired Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) Commission released a major report on children's health that contained invented studies, garbled references, and visible fingerprints of artificial intelligence.

Phantom Studies Behind a Real Policy

The latest controversy comes from [Hennepin County, Minnesota v. HHS](#), a lawsuit challenging Kennedy's overhaul of the TPP.

Congress [created](#) the program to fund local initiatives shown to reduce teen pregnancy, along with "promising" approaches that could be tested. HHS took a much narrower approach in 2026.

The department issued new [grant notices](#) that pushed recipients toward abstinence, "body literacy," reproductive-goals counseling and sexual-risk-avoidance education. A separate HHS [policy notice](#) barred programs from "encouraging, normalizing, or promoting sexual activity for minors" and required compliance with administration policies against "gender ideology" and DEI.

HHS also terminated virtually all existing TPP awards, according to the court.

That prompted Hennepin County, King County in Washington, Planned Parenthood of the Heartland, and the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States to sue.

On August 19, U.S. District Judge Christopher Cooper [granted](#) a preliminary injunction against implementation of the new policy and funding notices. He found that the plaintiffs were likely to succeed on their claim that HHS acted arbitrarily and capriciously.

Then came the largely overlooked part that made national news this week.



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A “Hallmark of AI-generated Citations”

HHS tried to support its new emphasis on “body literacy,” which it [defines](#) as understanding how a healthy body functions, including reproductive anatomy, physiology and hormonal patterns, and interpreting biological signals to make informed health decisions.

The problem was that much of the cited “science” could not be found.

Cooper wrote:

On the topic of body literacy, the notices (remarkably) reference public health studies that appear either not to exist or not to support the propositions for which they are cited — a hallmark of AI-generated citations.

He continued:

Two out of the seven appear to be completely made up. Three of the seven did not publish in the cited journals but appear to have similar titles to articles published in completely different journals.... And according to the early-stage factual record, there seem to be no pregnancy prevention curricula and programs that “center [on] body literacy” and other newly-imposed TPP requirements.

HHS did not bury the questionable references in a stray litigation brief. They appeared in government notices telling applicants what “science” federal money would follow.

The court found a deeper problem. HHS itself acknowledged a “near absence of body literacy education standards nationwide.” Yet the agency made “body literacy” a central requirement for grantees.

Cooper said HHS offered no adequate explanation for imposing that approach across the program.

HHS funding materials nevertheless tell applicants that eligible programs must reflect “high-quality evidence of effectiveness” and align with its “commitment to gold-standard science.”

The MAHA Report

Kennedy has been here before.

In May 2025, his MAHA Commission [released](#) its “Make Our Children Healthy Again” assessment, promoted as the “landmark report” intended to establish the scientific foundation for the administration’s childhood health agenda.

The report covered diet, environmental chemicals, screen use, prescription drugs, and the childhood vaccine schedule.

The document contained 522 footnotes.

The Washington Post [found](#) garbled references and reported that some citations contained the marker “oaicite,” an artifact associated with OpenAI-generated citation output. PolitiFact [identified](#) at least seven problematic citations. Four contained titles of nonexistent papers, while three mischaracterized real research.

One supposed study addressed anxiety and substance use among adolescents during the Covid era.



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Another purported to document overprescribing of oral corticosteroids to children with asthma. Neither cited paper was real.

The White House initially [dismissed the problems](#) as “formatting issues.” Officials then [updated the report](#). They replaced the nonexistent citations with real sources and, in some cases, changed the underlying claims those citations were supposed to support.

The report had already been presented as a scientific basis for national policy before anyone caught the fabricated references.

Washington Has No Business Here

The episode is more than another embarrassment for Kennedy. It is a stark reminder of why Washington should not wield this kind of power in the first place.

Americans can argue over abstinence education, “body literacy,” “gender ideology,” contraception, and the proper way to teach children about sexuality. Those are serious questions. But the federal government has no business imposing a national answer through funding mandates, administrative directives, and “scientific” claims that local communities are expected to accept as authoritative.

The latest scandal only underscores the danger. HHS used its enormous reach to redirect policy across the country, while citing research that may not even exist. Whether one agrees with the policy goal is beside the point. A centralized bureaucracy should not have the power to dictate such intimate and consequential matters to states, counties, schools and families.

As this magazine has long argued, that power should be returned to the states and local communities where it belongs. The recurring failures of HHS are not simply an argument for better management, better citations, or more careful use of AI. They are an argument for dismantling an unconstitutional federal health apparatus that has accumulated powers the Constitution never granted it.

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