

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR VETERANS CLAIMS

Thomas Stevenson, Jr. : Docket No.: 20-4870

Appellant, :

VS.

Denis McDonough :

Secretary of Veterans Affairs

Appellee. :

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vs.		
Secretary of Veterans Affairs	:	
Appellee.	:	

**APPELLANT'S APPLICATION FOR AN AWARD OF ATTORNEYS FEES
AND EXPENSES PURSUANT TO 28 U.S.C. § 2412(d)**

Pursuant to the Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA), 28 U.S.C. § 2412(d) and U.S. Vet. App. R. 39, Appellant, Thomas Stevenson, Jr., applies for an award of reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses in the amount of \$9,220.80.

I. PROCEDURAL HISTORY

On March 25, 2020, the Board of Veterans' Appeal (the "Board") issued a decision denying Appellant entitlement to compensation under 38 U.S.C. § 1151 for an unhealed wound on the right side of his stomach. Appellant filed a timely Notice of Appeal to this Court on July 7, 2020.

The Record Before the Agency ("RBA"), containing 13391 pages, was served upon the Appellant on November 16, 2020. Appellant reviewed the

RBA, and then served a Memorandum upon Appellee regarding issues on appeal in preparation of a conference before the Court's Central Legal Staff. On March 9, 2021, a conference was held with the assistance of the Court's Central Legal Staff.

At the conference, the parties were able to discuss in detail the case in hopes of reaching a joint resolution to the case. Unfortunately, no agreement could be reached. On May 24, 2021, the Appellant filed his principal brief. The Appellee's brief was filed on September 29, 2021. A Reply Brief was then filed on November 24, 2021.

The case was then assigned to the Honorable Chief Judge Bartley. This matter was then assigned to a panel. Oral argument was held on April 19, 2022. On October 4, 2022, an opinion was issued by the panel. In the decision, the court found that the Board employed the incorrect temporal focus in assessing whether the Appellant demonstrated additional disability and premised its decision on an understanding that evaluating for the presence of additional disability for purposes of section 1151 is distinct from evaluating for the presence of disability for purposes of section 1110. This also found that it was undisputed that Mr. Stevenson demonstrated additional disability during the pendency of his section 1151 claim. Therefore, that adverse finding on the threshold question of whether additional disability has been shown was reversed.

On October 26, 2022, Judgment was entered on the docket. Mandate was then issued on December 28, 2022.

II. AVERMENTS

Mr. Stevenson, Jr. was a prevailing party, the Secretary's position in this matter was not substantially justified, and Mr. Stevenson, Jr.'s net worth at the time the appeal was filed did not exceed \$2 million. Itemized statements detailing the time spent and fees sought on the case are attached. Mr. Stevenson, Jr. meets all of the criteria under the statute, and the Court should award fees as requested. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 2412(d).

III. ARGUMENT

A. APPELLANT IS A PREVAILING PARTY AND ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE AN AWARD.

To obtain "prevailing party" status, a party need only have obtained success "on any significant issue in litigation which achieve[d] some of the benefit . . . sought in bringing the suit." *Shalala v. Schaefer*, 113 S. Ct. 2625, 2632 (1993). Appellant is a prevailing party because the Court vacated the Board's decision based upon administrative error and remanded the case for further development and adjudication in accordance with its decision. See

Zuberi v. Nicholson, 19 Vet. App. 541 (2006); *Sumner v. Principi*, 15 Vet. App. 256 (2001) (en banc). This Court-ordered relief creates the “material alteration of the legal relationship of the parties necessary to permit an award of attorney’s fees.” *Buckhannon Bd. and Care Home, Inc. v. West Virginia Dep’t of Health and Human Res.*, 121 S. Ct. 1835, 1840 (2001) (quoting *Texas State Teachers Association v. Garland Indep. School Dist.*, 489 U.S. 782, 792 (1989)).

Appellant is a party eligible to receive an award of reasonable fees and expenses because his net worth did not exceed \$2 million at the time this civil action was filed, nor did he own any unincorporated business, partnership, corporation, association, unit of local government, or organization, of which the net worth exceeded \$7,000,000 (seven million dollars), and which had more than 500 employees. *See Bazalo v. Brown*, 9 Vet. App. 304, 309, 311 (1996). In addition, Appellant filed a Declaration of Financial Hardship, which was accepted for filing by the Court on July 20, 2020. *See Owens v. Brown*, 10 Vet. App. 65, 67 (1997).

B. THE POSITION OF THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WAS NOT SUBSTANTIALLY JUSTIFIED.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs can defeat Appellant's application for fees and costs only by demonstrating that the government's position was substantially justified. *See Brewer v. American Battle Monument Commission*, 814 F.2d 1564, 1566-67 (Fed. Cir. 1987); *Stillwell v. Brown*, 6 Vet. App. 291, 301 (1994). The U.S. Supreme Court has held that for the position of the government to be substantially justified, it must have a "reasonable basis both in law and fact." *Pierce v. Underwood*, 487 U.S. 552, 565 (1988); *accord, Beta Systems v. United States*, 866 F.2d 1404, 1406 (Fed. Cir. 1989).

In this case, the Secretary's administrative position was not substantially justified. As described more fully in the "Procedural History," *supra*, the Court vacated and remanded the Board decision and found that the Board improperly discussed and made a determination in regards to additional disability. This error, and the other errors made by the Board, had no reasonable basis in fact or in law. Moreover, there is no evidence that special circumstances exist in Appellant's case that would make an award of reasonable fees and expenses unjust. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 2412(d)(1)(A).

C. ITEMIZED STATEMENT OF SERVICES RENDERED AND
AMOUNTS OF REASONABLE FEES AND EXPENSES

An itemized statement of the services rendered and the reasonable fees and expenses for which Appellant seeks compensation is attached to this application as Exhibit A. Counsel also certifies that counsel has “(1) reviewed the...billing statement and is satisfied that it accurately reflects the work performed by all counsel and (2) considered and eliminated all time that is excessive or redundant.” *Baldrige and Demel v. Nicholson*, 19 Vet. App. 227, 240 (2005).

Appellant is seeking an hourly rate of \$204.00 per hour. This rate was determined by adjusting the \$125 per hour statutory EAJA rate by the increase in the cost of living as determined by the Consumer Price Index-U for Midwest-Urban. *See Mannino v. West*, 12 Vet. App. 242, 243 (1999). The increase was calculated for the period from 1996 (the start date of the EAJA rate), to 2021 May, the date closest to the mid-point date for the litigation in this case, using the method described in *Elczyn v Brown*, 7 Vet. App. 170, 181.

The rate was calculated as follows:

$\$125.00 \times \text{CPI-U}/153 = \text{attorney fee};$

$\text{CPI-U 2021 May} = 250.582$

$\$125.00 \times 250.582/153 = \$ 204.72$ per hour

Rounded down to \$ 204.00 per hour

Counsel also expended and advanced expenses during this case. Expenses included copying charges and postage. Counsel had a total amount of \$6.60 in expenses, which in the exercise of billing discretion, is not seeking reimbursement for.

Appellant has claimed a reasonable amount of fees, predicated upon "the number of hours reasonably expended on the litigation multiplied by a reasonable hourly rate." *Ussery v. Brown*, 10 Vet. App. 51, 53 (1997)

D. THE EXERCISE OF REASONABLE BILLING DISCRETION

a. Reasonable Billing Discretion

Counsel for Mr. Stevenson has exercised sound billing judgment and has made significant reductions in the billing itemization. Detailed itemizations clearly indicate where charges have been reduced or eliminated altogether. All time spent reviewing court orders or routine pleadings filed with the Court has been reduced. Further, all time spent drafting and filing motions for an extension of time has been eliminated. No time has been billed for work performed on unreasonable motions; for any argument made in a reply brief which repeats the same argument in the principal brief; for work

spent on activities that are not required for preparation of the billed pleading; and for irrelevant work.

WHEREFORE, Appellant respectfully requests that the Court award attorney's fees and expenses in the total amount of \$9,220.80 in this matter.

Date: January 23, 2023

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Maxwell D. Kinman

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EXHIBIT A

ITEMIZED BILLING STATEMENT

Thomas Stevenson, Jr.

Attorney Maxwell D. Kinman, Esq.

9/15/2020	0.3	Receive signed representation agreement from client with additional documents; Draft & e-file NOA and Representation Agreement.
	0.1	Create hard file, draft and mail representation letter to client and next steps.
9/18/2020	0.1	Mail client consent form.
12/7/2020	0.2	Draft & efile extension of time to review RBA. E-mail opposing counsel and leave telephone message.
1/13/2021	0.2	Receive copy of RBA from VA; ensure initial working condition and page amount; update calendar with review date
	0.1	Letter to client re: RBA received.
1/22/2021	5	Begin Reviewing RBA, including BVA Decision (13391 Total Pages), creating timeline and table of contents; Review RBA for any missing documents; Highlight and make comments on important facts, sections, and evidence in preparation for CLS conference and filing of briefs. (RBA Pages 1-3800);
1/23/2021	5.5	Continue Reviewing RBA, including BVA Decision (13391 Total Pages), creating timeline and table of contents; Review RBA for any missing documents;

- Highlight and make comments on important facts, sections, and evidence in preparation for CLS conference and filing of briefs. (RBA Pages 3800-7121);
- 1/24/2021 6.5 Continue Reviewing RBA, including BVA Decision (13391 Total Pages), creating timeline and table of contents; Review RBA for any missing documents; Highlight and make comments on important facts, sections, and evidence in preparation for CLS conference and filing of briefs. (RBA Pages 7121-end-End);
- 1/25/2021 0.1 Review notice from court regarding brief due in 60 days, update calendar.
- 0.1 Draft & mail client letter regarding brief due in 60 days and update of case.
- 2/14/2021 0.1 Update calendar with CLS Conference date.
- 0.1 Mail client letter re: CLS Conference
- 2/23/2021 1.3 Review RBA highlights, timeline, and notes for drafting of CLS Memo Notes, draft outline of CLS Memo arguments.
- 0.1 Begin Draft of CLS Conference Memo. Introduction
- 0.2 Draft Procedural Summary
- 0.3 Draft Factual Summary
- 0.8 Draft CLS Conference Memo and research case law re: Reasons & Bases.
- 0.2 Final editing of the CLS Conference Memo
- 0.1 E-mail opposing counsel and CAVC staff completed

CLS Conference Memo.

3/9/2021 0.1 Draft & e-file Rule 33 Certificate of Service

3/9/2021 0.3 Prepare for CLS Conference; Draft CLS Quick Notes in preparation of conference.

0.1 CLS Conference

0.1 Draft & Mail client letter re: CLS Conference.

3/26/2021 0.5 Phone call with client.

5/24/2021 1 Briefly review CLS Memo and RBA in preparation for Brief writing.

0.2 Set up form and format of Appellant Brief, insert main issues from CLS memo, create draft of statement of issues.

0.2 Draft Statement of the Case - Procedural Issues; review record for pertinent dates and citations.

0.2 Draft Statement of the Case - Facts

1.7 Draft section/research case law re: Reasons & Bases.

0.1 Finish and refine Statement of Issues

0.2 Draft Summary of the Argument.

0.1 Draft & set up headings for the table of contents.

0.5 Proofread all sections.

0.6 Compile Table of Authorities, including identifying complete record sections.

0.2 Final proofread and put together of brief.

0.1 E-file appellant brief.

0.1 Draft & mail client letter re: filing of Appellant brief and what to expect next.

7/7/2021 0.4 Phone call with client.

7/29/2021	0.1	Review filing re: extension of time for Appellee brief. Update Calendar.
10/4/2021	0.1	Download Appellee Brief. Draft & mail client letter re: Appellee Brief filing.
10/11/2021	0.5	Phone call with client.
11/24/2021	1	Review Appellee Brief for potential Reply Brief Arguments.
	0.2	Set up form and format of Reply Brief.
	0.8	Draft Reply Brief, R&B.
	0.2	Review and edit Reply Brief
	0.3	Draft Table of Contents/Authorities - Final Editing
	0.1	E-File Reply Brief.
12/4/2021	0.5	Review ROP for accuracy
	0.1	Draft & efile response to ROP.
12/7/2021	0.1	Letter to client re: Judge assigned.
2/15/2022	0.1	Letter to client re: Oral Argument.
4/8/2022	6	Prepare for Oral Argument -Review filings, briefs, legal research.
4/15/2022	3	Prepare for Oral Argument - Mock Argument with Simulated questions.
4/19/2022	1.6	Oral Argument.
7/8/2022	0.5	Phone call with client.
1/23/2023	0.8	Prepare drafting of EAJA application, set-up format, review of pertinent case law and statutes.
	1	Draft EAJA application, Review & edit billing statement for EAJA, ensure accuracy of all time entries, ensure complete descriptions of all entries;

exercise billing judgment to remove time that is duplicative or clerical or time that would not be charged to a private client.

0.1 Finalize and file EAJA application

Total Hours: 45.2

Total Fee: \$9,220.80

EXHIBIT B

Consumer Price Index - All Urban Consumers

Series Id: CUUR0200SA0,CUUS0200SA0
 Not Seasonally Adjusted
Area: Midwest
Item: All items
Base Period: 1982-84=100

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Annual	HALF1	HALF2
1996	150.2	150.8	151.7	152.3	152.7	152.9	153.2	153.4	154.0	154.4	155.0	155.3	153.0	151.8	154.2
1997	155.5	155.9	155.9	156.1	156.3	156.7	156.6	157.2	157.5	157.7	157.7	157.3	156.7	156.1	157.3
1998	157.6	158.0	158.4	159.0	159.4	159.5	159.8	159.5	159.9	160.1	160.1	159.8	159.3	158.7	159.9
1999	160.4	160.5	161.0	162.2	162.2	162.5	162.9	163.2	164.3	164.3	164.6	164.4	162.7	161.5	164.0
2000	164.9	165.9	167.1	167.0	167.5	169.7	168.8	168.2	170.0	170.1	170.3	170.2	168.3	167.0	169.6
2001	171.9	172.1	171.7	172.8	174.2	173.8	172.5	173.0	174.6	172.6	172.5	171.9	172.8	172.8	172.9
2002	172.1	172.5	173.6	174.7	174.8	175.3	175.3	175.8	176.2	176.3	176.1	175.5	174.9	173.8	175.9
2003	176.2	177.8	178.6	177.8	177.7	178.4	178.1	178.8	179.5	179.1	178.9	178.4	178.3	177.8	178.8
2004	179.4	180.2	181.0	181.5	182.9	183.3	183.2	183.3	183.6	184.5	184.8	183.8	182.6	181.4	183.9
2005	184.1	185.2	186.3	187.7	187.4	187.8	188.4	189.7	192.5	192.1	190.3	189.7	188.4	186.4	190.5
2006	190.8	190.7	192.0	193.0	193.6	194.1	194.6	195.1	193.7	192.3	192.8	192.9	193.0	192.4	193.6
2007	193.068	194.458	196.389	197.405	199.194	199.263	198.989	198.551	199.714	199.455	200.762	200.227	198.123	196.629	199.616
2008	201.427	201.896	203.723	205.393	207.168	208.968	210.071	209.351	209.252	206.019	201.737	199.582	205.382	204.763	206.002
2009	200.815	201.453	202.021	202.327	203.195	205.350	204.814	205.632	205.601	205.706	206.247	205.613	204.064	202.527	205.602
2010	206.564	206.563	207.359	207.777	207.987	207.886	208.211	208.639	208.788	208.689	208.816	209.270	208.046	207.356	208.736
2011	210.388	211.090	212.954	214.535	215.899	215.954	216.099	216.586	216.968	215.653	215.614	215.173	214.743	213.470	216.016
2012	216.368	216.855	218.975	219.405	219.145	219.017	218.956	220.462	221.125	220.375	219.483	219.033	219.100	218.294	219.906
2013	219.282	221.599	222.121	221.931	223.049	223.775	222.902	223.046	223.252	222.171	221.718	221.194	222.170	221.960	222.381
2014	222.247	223.493	225.485	226.214	226.565	227.588	226.997	226.587	226.913	225.793	224.396	222.821	225.425	225.265	225.585
2015	221.545	222.301	223.550	223.797	224.732	225.946	225.853	225.830	225.184	225.050	224.009	222.722	224.210	223.645	224.775
2016	223.301	223.196	224.621	225.609	226.476	227.835	226.786	227.097	227.636	227.358	226.673	226.794	226.115	225.173	227.057
2017	228.279	228.633	228.824	229.682	229.705	229.780	229.820	230.443	231.030	230.660	231.084	230.548	229.874	229.151	230.598
2018	232.028	232.512	232.931	233.913	235.065	235.455	235.346	235.276	235.524	235.680	234.292	233.458	234.290	233.651	234.929
2019	233.837	235.444	236.793	237.510	238.219	238.288	238.760	238.786	238.847	239.243	238.850	238.734	237.776	236.682	238.870
2020	239.690	240.421	239.163	236.474	237.291	239.259	240.430	241.362	241.878	241.740	241.316	241.453	240.040	238.716	241.363
2021	242.552	244.477	246.246	248.169	250.582	253.042	254.671	255.142	255.709	257.793	258.911	259.609	252.242	247.511	256.973
2022	261.657	263.988	267.312	268.639	272.673	277.072	276.525	275.875	276.549	276.908	276.463			268.557	