

In the United States Court of Federal Claims
OFFICE OF SPECIAL MASTERS
No. 23-62V

ROGER GREGG,

Petitioner,

v.

SECRETARY OF HEALTH
AND HUMAN SERVICES,

Respondent.

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Chief Special Master Corcoran

Filed: November 14, 2024

Leigh Finfer, Muller Brazil, LLP, Dresher, PA, for Petitioner.

Benjamin P. Warder, U.S. Dep’t of Justice, Washington, DC, for Respondent.

DECISION GRANTING FINAL AWARD OF ATTORNEY’S FEES AND COSTS¹

On January 18, 2023, Roger Gregg filed a petition seeking compensation under the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program (the “Vaccine Program”).² Petitioner alleged that he suffered right-sided radial sensory neuropathy that was caused-in-fact by his receipt of the tetanus, diphtheria, and acellular pertussis vaccine on March 20, 2020. The parties agreed on a stipulation resolving the case, and I issued a decision awarding Petitioner compensation. *See* Decision, dated Sept. 12, 2024 (ECF No. 25).

Petitioner has now filed a motion for a final award of attorney’s fees and costs. Motion, dated Oct. 25, 2024 (ECF No. 30) (“Mot.”). This is Petitioner’s sole such request. Petitioner seeks an award of \$14,049.75 (\$13,566.80 in fees, plus \$482.95 in costs) for the work of the attorneys

¹ Under Vaccine Rule 18(b), each party has fourteen (14) days within which to request redaction “of any information furnished by that party: (1) that is a trade secret or commercial or financial in substance and is privileged or confidential; or (2) that includes medical files or similar files, the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of privacy.” Vaccine Rule 18(b). Otherwise, the whole Decision will be available to the public in its present form. *Id.*

² The Vaccine Program comprises Part 2 of the National Childhood Vaccine Injury Act of 1986, Pub. L. No. 99-660, 100 Stat. 3758, codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. §§ 300aa-10 through 34 (2012) (“Vaccine Act” or “the Act”). Individual section references hereafter will be to § 300aa of the Act (but will omit that statutory prefix).

and paralegals at the law firm of Muller Brazil, LLP. Mot. at 1–2. Respondent reacted to the fees request on November 8, 2024. Response, dated Nov. 8, 2024 (ECF No. 31) (“Resp.”). Respondent agrees that Petitioner has satisfied the statutory requirements for a fees and costs award, and otherwise defers the calculation of the amount to be awarded to my discretion. Resp. at 2–3. Petitioner did not file a reply.

For the reasons set forth below, I hereby **GRANT** Petitioner’s motion, awarding fees and costs in the total amount of **\$14,049.75**.

I. Calculation of Fees

Because Petitioner’s claim was successful, he is entitled to a fees and costs award—although only “reasonable” fees or costs may be awarded in the Program. Determining the appropriate amount of the fees award is a two-part process. The first part involves application of the lodestar method—“multiplying the number of hours reasonably expended on the litigation times a reasonable hourly rate.” *Avera v. Sec’y of Health & Hum. Servs.*, 515 F.3d 1343, 1347–48 (Fed. Cir. 2008) (quoting *Blum v. Stenson*, 465 U.S. 886, 888 (1984)). The second part involves adjusting the lodestar calculation up or down to take relevant factors into consideration. *Id.* at 1348. This standard for calculating a fee award is considered applicable in most cases where a fee award is authorized by federal statute. *Hensely v. Eckerhart*, 461 U.S. 424, 429–37 (1983).

An attorney’s reasonable hourly rate is determined by the “forum rule,” which bass the proper hourly rate to be awarded on the forum in which the relevant court sits (Washington, D.C., for Vaccine Act cases), *except* where an attorney’s work was not performed in the forum and there is a substantial difference in rates (the so-called “*Davis*” exception”). *Avera*, 515 F.3d at 1348 (citing *Davis Cty. Solid Waste Mgmt. & Energy Recovery Special Serv. Dist. v. U.S. Envtl. Prot. Agency*, 169 F.3d 755, 758 (D.C. Cir. 1999)). A 2015 decision established the hourly rate ranges for attorneys with different levels of experience who are entitled to the forum rate in the Vaccine Program. *See McCulloch v. Sec’y of Health & Hum. Servs.*, No. 09-293V, 2015 WL 5634323, at *19 (Fed. Cl. Spec. Mstr. Sept. 1, 2015).

Petitioner requests the following rates for his attorney and support staff, based on the years work was performed:

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Paul Brazil (Attorney)	--	\$400.00	--	--
Leigh Finfer (Attorney)	--	\$250.00	\$275.00	\$300.00
Stacie Bole (Paralegal)	--	\$125.00	--	--

Stacey Bowman (Paralegal)	\$125.00	--	--	--
Erik Pavlacsek (Paralegal)	--	--	\$140.00	\$140.00
Tereza Pavlacsek (Paralegal)	--	--	\$177.00	\$177.00
Kaitlyn Roedel (Paralegal)	--	--	\$140.00	--
Marcela Senerth (Paralegal)	\$125.00	\$125.00	\$140.00	\$140.00
Kary Yoos (Paralegal)	--	--	--	\$165.00

Mot. at 5–16.

The attorneys in question (primarily Ms. Finfer) practice in Dresher, PA—a jurisdiction that has been deemed “in forum.” Accordingly, they should be paid forum rates as established in *McCulloch*. See *Colagreco v. Sec’y of Health & Hum. Servs.*, No. 14-465V, 2016 WL 6518579 (Fed. Cl. Spec. Mstr. Sept. 26, 2016). The rates requested are also consistent with what has previously been awarded for their work, in accordance with the Office of Special Masters’ fee schedule.³ *Brotman v. Sec’y of Health & Hum. Servs.*, No. 21-905V, 2024 WL 1859822 (Fed. Cl. Spec. Mstr. Mar. 27, 2024). I thus find no cause to reduce them in this instance. And I deem the time devoted to the matter to be reasonable. I shall also award the requested paralegal time at the provided rates.

II. Calculation of Attorney’s Costs

Just as they are required to establish the reasonableness of requested fees, petitioners must also demonstrate that requested litigation costs are reasonable. *Presault v. United States*, 52 Fed. Cl. 667, 670 (2002); *Perreira v. Sec’y of Dep’t of Health & Hum. Servs.*, 27 Fed. Cl. 29, 34 (1992). Reasonable costs include the costs of obtaining medical records and expert time incurred while working on a case. *Fester v. Sec’y of Health & Hum. Servs.*, No. 10-243V, 2013 WL 5367670, at *16 (Fed. Cl. Spec. Mstr. Aug. 27, 2013). When petitioners fail to substantiate a cost item, such as by not providing appropriate documentation to explain the basis for a particular cost, special masters have refrained from paying the cost at issue. See, e.g., *Gardner-Cook v. Sec’y of Health & Hum. Servs.*, No. 99-480V, 2005 WL 6122520, at *4 (Fed. Cl. Spec. Mstr. June 30, 2005).

Petitioner seeks \$482.95 in outstanding costs, including the filing fee, medical record retrieval costs, and mailing costs. Mot. at 18. All of these expenses are commonly incurred in the Vaccine Program, and are reasonable herein. Thus, all requested costs shall be awarded in full.

³ OSM Attorneys’ Forum Hourly Rate Fee Schedule, <https://www.uscfc.uscourts.gov/node/2914> (last visited Nov. 14, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing, and in the exercise of the discretion afforded to me in determining the propriety of a final fees award, I **GRANT** Petitioner's Motion for Attorney's Fees and Costs in its entirety. I award a total of **\$14,049.75**, reflecting \$13,566.80 in attorney's fees and \$482.95 in costs in the form of a check made jointly payable to Petitioner and his attorney, Ms. Leigh Finfer.

In the absence of a motion for review filed pursuant to RCFC Appendix B, the Clerk of the Court **SHALL ENTER JUDGMENT** in accordance with the terms of this Decision.⁴

IT IS SO ORDERED.

/s/ Brian H. Corcoran
Brian H. Corcoran
Chief Special Master

⁴ Pursuant to Vaccine Rule 11(a), the parties may expedite entry of judgment if (jointly or separately) they file notices renouncing their right to seek review.