

COURT OF APPEALS, SECOND APPELLATE DISTRICT OF TEXAS AT FORT WORTH

Texas Health Harris Methodist Hospital Fort Worth v. Stephen Featherly

Texas Health Harris Methodist Hospital Fort Worth v. Featherly, No. 02-24-00572-CV (Tex. App.—Fort Worth Dec. 23, 2025) · No. No. 02-24-00572-CV · Decided December 23, 2025

SUMMARY

The Texas Court of Appeals, Second Appellate District, considered a hospital’s challenge to an attorney’s-fee award in a declaratory-judgment action concerning the reasonable and regular rate supporting a hospital lien. The court held that the trial court did not abuse its discretion in awarding fees to the patient while denying fees to the hospital, but modified the judgment to reduce the fee award by \$9,056 because of legally insufficient evidence and a discrepancy in billing records. As modified, the judgment was affirmed.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Court of Appeals, Second Appellate District of Texas at Fort Worth
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Dabney Bassel; Sudderth, C.J.; Birdwell, J.; Bassel, J.
JURISDICTION	Court of Appeals, Second Appellate District of Texas at Fort Worth
DECIDED	December 23, 2025
DOCKET	No. 02-24-00572-CV
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	The Hospital appealed the trial court's discretionary award of attorney's fees to Featherly under the Uniform Declaratory Judgments Act and its denial of the Hospital's request for attorney's fees. The Hospital also challenged the sufficiency of the evidence supporting portions of the fee award.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Attorney's-fee awards under the Uniform Declaratory Judgments Act are reviewed for abuse of discretion. The reviewing court considers whether the trial court had sufficient information to exercise its discretion under legal- and factual-sufficiency standards and whether the trial court made a reasonable decision based on the evidence and applicable guiding principles. A trial court abuses its discretion when it

	acts arbitrarily, unreasonably, or without reference to guiding legal principles.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	published
PARTIES	Texas Health Harris Methodist Hospital Fort Worth v. Stephen Featherly

TOPICS

attorney fees declaratory judgment health law appellate procedure standard of review

PRACTICE AREAS

health law civil procedure appellate procedure remedies

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the trial court abused its discretion by awarding Featherly \$196,166 in attorney's fees under the Uniform Declaratory Judgments Act.
2. Whether legally sufficient evidence supported the portions of the fee award attributable to legal assistants and the amount claimed in one attorney's affidavit.
3. Whether the trial court abused its discretion by denying the Hospital attorney's fees for defending against Featherly's declaratory-judgment action.

HOLDINGS

1. The trial court did not abuse its discretion in determining that an award of attorney's fees to Featherly was reasonable, equitable, and just, even though the award exceeded the amount by which the Hospital's lien was reduced.
2. The evidence was legally insufficient to support \$6,101.50 in presumed legal-assistant fees because the record did not establish the assistants' qualifications, substantive legal work, supervision, or the reasonableness of their rates and time.
3. The evidence was insufficient to support \$2,954.50 because the amount requested in Michel's affidavit did not match the total fees shown in the billing records.
4. The trial court did not abuse its discretion by denying the Hospital's request for attorney's fees.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"We therefore hold that the trial court did not abuse its discretion by determining that this case presented unique circumstances that warranted a fee award that exceeded the amount in dispute." (at 34)

"Because there was no evidence concerning the legal assistants' qualifications, whether they performed substantive legal work under the direction and supervision of an attorney, or whether their fees were reasonable, we hold that the evidence is legally insufficient to support the legal-assistant fees that were included in the fee award based on the total fees submitted by Michel." (at 42)

“As modified, we affirm the trial court’s judgment.” (at 49)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Featherly was injured in a 2014 motor-vehicle accident and received emergency-room treatment from the Hospital. The Hospital claimed charges of \$24,682 and filed a statutory hospital lien, while Featherly contended that the reasonable and regular rate was lower. After a declaratory-judgment action and an earlier appeal, a second jury determined that the reasonable and regular rate was \$18,559.25. The trial court awarded Featherly attorney's fees under the UDJA and denied the Hospital's fee request; the record showed that both sides had incurred or budgeted approximately \$200,000 in fees while litigating the lien.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

After a prior appeal resulted in a remand for a new trial on the Hospital's ratification defense, a second jury found that \$18,559.25 was the reasonable and regular rate for the Hospital's services. The trial court declared the Hospital's lien invalid to the extent it exceeded that amount, awarded Featherly \$196,166 in attorney's fees, and denied the Hospital's fee request. The court of appeals held that the trial court did not abuse its discretion in awarding fees to Featherly and denying fees to the Hospital, but modified the judgment to remove \$9,056 from the award because the evidence did not support presumed legal-assistant fees and part of the amount claimed in counsel's affidavit.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Tex. Health Harris Methodist Hosp. Fort Worth v. Featherly, 648 S.W.3d 556, 561-65, 565-85 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2022, pets. denied)
- Bocquet v. Herring, 972 S.W.2d 19, 20-21 (Tex. 1998)
- Rohrmoos Venture v. UTSW DVA Healthcare, LLP, 578 S.W.3d 469, 494-503 (Tex. 2019)
- El Apple I, Ltd. v. Olivas, 370 S.W.3d 757, 760, 763-64 (Tex. 2012)
- Smith v. Patrick W.Y. Tam Trust, 296 S.W.3d 545, 548 (Tex. 2009)
- Berry v. Berry, 646 S.W.3d 516, 531 (Tex. 2022)
- Farmers Group, Inc. v. Geter, 620 S.W.3d 702, 712-13 (Tex. 2021)
- Uptown Cars, Inc. v. Newcastle Management Trust, 715 S.W.3d 825, 845-46 (Tex. App.—Austin 2024, no pet.)
- Unifund CCR Partners v. Villa, 299 S.W.3d 92, 97 (Tex. 2009)
- Daughters of Charity Health Services of Waco v. Linnstaedter, 226 S.W.3d 409, 411 (Tex. 2007)
- Arthur Andersen & Co. v. Perry Equipment Corp., 945 S.W.2d 812 (Tex. 1997)
- Tex. National Bank v. Sandia Mortgage Corp., 872 F.2d 692, 700 (5th Cir. 1989)
- All Seasons Window & Door Manufacturing, Inc. v. Red Dot Corp., 181 S.W.3d 490, 504 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 2005, no pet.)

- Multi-Moto Corp. v. ITT Commercial Finance Corp., 806 S.W.2d 560, 570 (Tex. App.—Dallas 1990, writ denied) (op. on reh'g)
- Moody v. EMC Services, Inc., 828 S.W.2d 237, 248 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1992, writ denied)
- Guardianship of Alford, 596 S.W.3d 352, 361 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 2020, no pet.)
- Clary Corp. v. Smith, 949 S.W.2d 452, 469-70 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 1997, pet. denied)
- Gill Savings Association v. International Supply Co., 759 S.W.2d 697, 705 (Tex. App.—Dallas 1988, writ denied)

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