

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF
ARKANSAS, HOT SPRINGS DIVISION

Matthew Rowland v. Frank Bisignano, Commissioner, Social Security
Administration

Rowland · No. 6:25-cv-06006-SOH-MEF · Decided December 11, 2025

SUMMARY

A United States magistrate judge recommends granting Matthew Rowland's unopposed motion for attorney fees under the Equal Access to Justice Act. The recommendation awards \$8,500 in attorney fees and \$405 in costs, subject to the rules concerning payment to the plaintiff or counsel and avoiding double recovery under 42 U.S.C. § 406.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Western District of Arkansas, Hot Springs Division
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Mark E. Ford
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Western District of Arkansas, Hot Springs Division
DECIDED	December 11, 2025
DOCKET	6:25-cv-06006-SOH-MEF
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Report and recommendation on Plaintiff's amended motion for attorney fees and costs under the Equal Access to Justice Act.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	For an EAJA fee request, the Commissioner bears the burden of showing that the government's position was substantially justified; the court evaluates the reasonableness of the hours and requested hourly rate. Objections to the report and recommendation must be timely and specific to trigger de novo review by the district court.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Nonprecedential report and recommendation; not a final district-court judgment in the source text.

TOPICS

- attorney fees
- costs
- administrative law
- judicial review of agency action
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

Social Security

administrative law

attorney fees

costs

civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Plaintiff was entitled to an EAJA award because he was the prevailing party and the government's denial of benefits was not substantially justified.
2. Whether the requested attorney hours, paralegal hours, and CPI-adjusted hourly rate were reasonable.
3. Whether the EAJA award should include reimbursement of the \$405 filing fee and be payable to Plaintiff subject to any valid assignment and federal-government debt offset.

HOLDINGS

1. The magistrate judge recommended finding that Plaintiff was entitled to an EAJA award because he was the prevailing party, the government's decision was not substantially justified, and the requested hours and hourly rate were reasonable.
2. The magistrate judge recommended awarding Plaintiff \$8,500 in attorney fees and \$405 in costs under the EAJA, with the fee award payable to Plaintiff unless a valid assignment and absence of outstanding federal debt permit direct payment to counsel.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Accordingly, the undersigned finds that the Plaintiff is entitled to an attorney’s fee award under EAJA in the amount of \$8,500.00, plus costs.”

“Accordingly, the undersigned RECOMMENDS awarding Plaintiff the sum of \$8,500.00 for attorney’s fees, plus \$405.00 in costs pursuant to the EAJA, 28 U.S.C. § 2412.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff sought attorney fees under the EAJA after the government's decision denying Social Security benefits was not substantially justified. He requested \$8,500, based on 35.90 attorney hours, 1.50 paralegal hours, and reimbursement of a \$405 filing fee. The Commissioner stipulated to the allowance of the requested fees.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

After prevailing in the underlying Social Security benefits action, Plaintiff moved for attorney fees and costs under the EAJA. The Commissioner stipulated to the allowance of fees and did not oppose the request. The magistrate judge recommended that the district court award \$8,500 in attorney fees and \$405 in costs, subject to any timely objections.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Jackson v. Bowen, 807 F.2d 127, 128 (8th Cir. 1986)
- Johnson v. Sullivan, 919 F.2d 503, 505 (8th Cir. 1990)
- Hensley v. Eckerhart, 461 U.S. 424, 430 (1983)
- Astrue v. Ratliff, 560 U.S. 586, 596 (2010)

OPINION

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT WESTERN DISTRICT OF ARKANSAS HOT SPRINGS DIVISION MATTHEW ROWLAND PLAINTIFF v. CIVIL NO. 6:25-cv-06006-SOH-MEF FRANK BISIGNANO, Commissioner Social Security Administration DEFENDANT
MAGISTRATE JUDGE'S REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION Pending now before this Court is Plaintiff's Amended Motion for Attorney Fees Under the Equal Access to Justice Act.

(ECF No. 18). On November 13, 2025, Plaintiff filed An Unopposed Motion for Attorney's Fees and costs under 28 U.S.C. § 2412, the Equal Access to Justice Act ("EAJA"), requesting \$8,500.00, representing a total of 35.90 attorney hours in 2024; 1.50 paralegal hours; and reimbursement for the \$405.00 filing fee. (ECF No. 17).

The Commissioner also filed a Stipulation for the Allowance of Attorney fees agreeing to this fee. (ECF No. 15) I. Discussion It is the opinion of the undersigned that the Plaintiff is entitled to a fee award in this case, as he is the prevailing party, the government's decision to deny benefits was not "substantially justified," the hourly rate requested for attorney hours does not exceed the CPI for the years in question, and the time asserted to have been spent in the representation of the Plaintiff before the district court is reasonable.

See Jackson v. Bowen, 807 F.2d 127, 128 (8th Cir. 1986) (burden is on the Commissioner to show substantial justification for the government's denial of benefits); 28 U.S.C. § 2412(d)(2)(A) (statutory ceiling for an EAJA fee award is \$125.00 per hour); Johnson v. Sullivan, 919 F.2d 503, 505 (8th Cir. 1990) (court may determine that there has been an increase in the cost of living, and may thereby increase the attorney's rate per hour, based upon the United States Department of Labor's Consumer Price Index ("CPI")); Hensley v. Eckerhart, 461 U.S. 424, 430 (1983) (in determining reasonableness, court looks at time and labor required; the difficulty of questions involved; the skill required to handle the problems presented; the attorney's experience, ability, and reputation; the benefits resulting to the client from the services; the customary fee for similar services; the contingency or certainty of compensation; the results obtained; and, the amount involved); and General Order 39 (the Court's standing Order allowing for enhanced hourly rates based on the CPI-South for December of the previous year).

Accordingly, the undersigned finds that the Plaintiff is entitled to an attorney's fee award under EAJA in the amount of \$8,500.00, plus costs. Pursuant to Astrue v. Ratliff, 560 U.S. 586, 596

(2010), the EAJA fee award should be made payable to Plaintiff; however, if the Plaintiff has executed a valid assignment to Plaintiff's attorney of all rights in a fee award and Plaintiff owes no outstanding debt to the federal government, the attorney's fee may be awarded directly to Plaintiff's attorney.

The parties are reminded that, to prevent double recovery by counsel for the Plaintiff, the award herein under the EAJA will be considered at such time as a reasonable fee is determined pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 406. II. Conclusion Accordingly, the undersigned RECOMMENDS awarding Plaintiff the sum of \$8,500.00 for attorney's fees, plus \$405.00 in costs pursuant to the EAJA, 28 U.S.C. § 2412.

The parties have fourteen (14) days from receipt of our report and recommendation in which to file written objections pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1). The failure to file timely objections may result in waiver of the right to appeal questions of fact.

We remind the parties that objections must be both timely and specific to trigger de novo review by the district court. Dated this 11th day of December 2025. Mark E. Ford /s/ HON. MARK E. FORD UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE