

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY

Antonio Jones v. NJ DOC Central Transportation et al.

Jones · No. 18-1454 (RK) (JTQ) · Decided February 24, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of New Jersey denied Antonio Jones’s appeal from a magistrate judge’s denial of pre-approval for \$76,400 in expert fees from the District’s pro bono fund. The court held that the requested reimbursement was neither fair, reasonable, nor necessary and that the magistrate judge’s ruling was not clearly erroneous, contrary to law, or an abuse of discretion. The court affirmed the magistrate judge’s opinion without reaching the alternative due process issue.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of New Jersey
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Robert Kirsch
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of New Jersey
DECIDED	February 24, 2026
DOCKET	18-1454 (RK) (JTQ)
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff appealed a magistrate judge's denial of his application for pre-approval of \$76,400 in expert-related pro bono litigation expenses from the District of New Jersey's Attorney's Admission Fee Account. The district court reviewed the appeal under the standards applicable to a magistrate judge's ruling on a non-dispositive matter.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	A magistrate judge's ruling on a non-dispositive matter may be set aside only if it is clearly erroneous or contrary to law. Such rulings are reviewed for abuse of discretion, and the appealing party bears the burden of demonstrating clear error, legal error, or abuse of discretion.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential
PARTIES	Antonio Jones v. NJ DOC Central Transportation et al., Abu Ahsan, M.D.

TOPICS

- appellate procedure
- standard of review
- discovery dispute
- prisoners rights
- civil rights

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

prisoner civil rights

appellate procedure

pro bono litigation expenses

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the magistrate judge's denial of Plaintiff's request for pre-approval of \$76,400 in expert expenses was clearly erroneous or contrary to law.
2. Whether Appendix H of the District of New Jersey's Local Civil Rules imposed a mandatory obligation to approve Plaintiff's requested reimbursement whenever funds were available.
3. Whether the district court needed to address the magistrate judge's alternative due-process rationale.

HOLDINGS

1. The denial of Plaintiff's application was properly upheld because the requested expert expenses were not shown to be fair, reasonable, and necessary, and the magistrate judge's determination was supported by competent evidence and was neither clearly erroneous nor contrary to law.
2. Appendix H does not impose a mandatory obligation to approve every fee request. The Court retains discretion to deny requests that are unreasonable or unnecessary.
3. The district court did not need to address the magistrate judge's alternative due-process rationale because the denial was independently affirmable on the ground that the requested expenses were not fair, reasonable, or necessary.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"Because the Court finds that Judge Quinn's denial was based on two independently sufficient grounds and plainly affirmable on reasonableness grounds alone, the Court need not address Judge Quinn's alternative holding on due process grounds." (6)

"Additionally, As Judge Quinn noted, this District's Application for Pre- Approval of Pro Bono Services states that appointed attorneys "are encouraged to seek free or reduced costs for depositions, experts and other services,"" (8)

"For the reasons set forth above, Plaintiff's Appeal, (ECF No. 198), is DENIED and Judge Quinn's Opinion, (ECF. No. 197), is AFFIRMED." (12)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff, a state prisoner pursuing an Eighth Amendment deliberate-indifference claim concerning treatment of a pituitary tumor, sought to retain a neurosurgeon as an expert. After previously receiving approval for \$37,500 and spending \$25,950, Plaintiff requested pre-approval of an additional \$89,000, later reduced to \$76,400 after only modest reductions in the expert's rates. The record contained no evidence that Plaintiff sought alternative experts or produced comparable fee information, and the requested amount was substantially greater than amounts previously approved in comparable pro bono matters.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

In an underlying prisoner civil-rights action, Plaintiff sought funding for a neurosurgical expert. A magistrate judge previously approved \$37,500 in expenses and later denied Plaintiff's request for an additional \$76,400 because the requested amount was not reasonable and necessary and raised due-process concerns. The district court declined to reach the alternative constitutional rationale, held that the reasonableness determination was supported by the record and was not clearly erroneous or contrary to law, denied the appeal, and affirmed the magistrate judge's decision.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Marks v. Struble, 347 F. Supp. 2d 136, 149 (D.N.J. 2004)
- Cipollone v. Liggett Grp., Inc., 785 F.2d 1108, 1113 (3d Cir. 1986)
- Cooper Hosp./Univ. Med. Ctr. v. Sullivan, 183 F.R.D. 119, 127 (D.N.J. 1998)
- Lo Bosco v. Kure Eng'g Ltd., 891 F. Supp. 1035, 1037 (D.N.J. 1995)
- United States v. U.S. Gypsum Co., 333 U.S. 364, 395 (1948)
- In re Allergan Biocell Textured Breast Implant Prods. Liab. Litig., No. 19-2921, 2022 WL 3211421, at *3 (D.N.J. Aug. 9, 2022)
- Hooker v. Novo Nordisk Inc., No. 16-4562, 2019 WL 2521749, at *2 (D.N.J. June 19, 2019)
- Gunter v. Ridgewood Energy Corp., 32 F. Supp. 2d 162, 164 (D.N.J. 1998)
- Travelers Indem. Co. v. Dammann & Co., 592 F. Supp. 2d 752, 758-59 (D.N.J. 2008), aff'd, 594 F.3d 238 (3d Cir. 2010)
- United States v. Walls, 290 F. App'x 454, 455 (3d Cir. 2008)
- United States v. Williams, 443 F.3d 35, 46 (2d Cir. 2006)
- Esteras v. United States, 606 U.S. 185, 190 n.1 (2025)
- Fagan v. Fischer, No. 14-7013, 2018 WL 2859541, at *3 (D.N.J. June 11, 2018)
- Lindy Bros. Builders v. Am. Radiator & Standard Sanitary Corp., 540 F.2d 102, 115 (3d Cir. 1976)
- Cordero-Rezabala v. United States, No. 24-4010, 2024 WL 1673366, at *4 (D.N.J. Apr. 18, 2024)
- Sidali v. INS, 107 F.3d 191, 199 (3d Cir. 1997)
- United States v. Otero, 502 F.3d 331, 334 n.1 (3d Cir. 2007)
- Mills v. Rogers, 457 U.S. 291, 305 (1982)
- Tompkins v. Hackett, 841 F. App'x 367, 369 n.2 (3d Cir. 2021) (per curiam)
- M&T Bank v. Arsenis, No. 23-2324, 2024 WL 1171081, at *1 n.1 (3d Cir. Mar. 19, 2024) (per curiam)
- Maybin v. Slobodian, 739 F. App'x 161, 165 n.4 (3d Cir. 2018)
- Tourscher v. McCullough, 184 F.3d 236, 240 (3d Cir. 1999)
- Orabi v. Att'y Gen. of the U.S., 738 F.3d 535, 537 n.1 (3d Cir. 2013)
- SigmaPharm, Inc. v. Mutual Pharm. Co., 772 F. Supp. 2d 660, 667 n.41 (E.D. Pa. 2011), aff'd, 454 F. App'x 64 (3d Cir. 2011)

- Celgene Corp. v. Natco Pharma Ltd., No. 10-5197, 2015 WL 4138982, at *2 (D.N.J. July 9, 2015)
- Lithuanian Com. Corp. v. Sara Lee Hosiery, 177 F.R.D. 205, 213 (D.N.J. 1997)
- Szemple v. Univ. of Med. & Dentistry of N.J., No. 10-5445, ECF No. 55 (D.N.J. May 23, 2014)
- Rolkiewicz v. Corr. Med. Servs. Inc., No. 05-2943, ECF No. 62 (D.N.J. July 31, 2006)
- Oliver v. Main, No. 12-3757, ECF No. 94 (D.N.J. May 26, 2015)
- Travelers Indem. Co. v. Barnickel Enters., Inc., No. 09-5068, ECF No. 32 (D.N.J. Mar. 25, 2011)
- Colston v. Corr. Med. Servs., No. 04-3209, ECF No. 52 (D.N.J. Nov. 14, 2008)
- Groover v. U.S. Corr., LLC, No. 15-61902 (S.D. Fla. June 21, 2019)

Retrieved from lawtools.ai · <https://lawtools.ai/cases/state/united-states-district-court-for-the-district-of-new-jersey-united-states-district-court-for-the-dis/2026/antonio-jones-v-nj-doc-central-transportation-et-al-9i02mxe0>