

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF
NEW YORK

Michael E. v. Commissioner of Social Security

No. 3:23-CV-1363 (DJS), United States District Court for the Northern District of New York (February 9, 2026)

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Northern District of New York grants Plaintiff's counsel's motion for attorney's fees under 42 U.S.C. § 406(b) following a remand in a Social Security disability benefits case and a favorable decision on remand. The court awards \$15,208.75, payable from past-due benefits withheld by the Commissioner, and directs counsel to remit to Plaintiff any fees previously received under the Equal Access to Justice Act.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Northern District of New York
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Daniel J. Stewart
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Northern District of New York
DECIDED	February 9, 2026
DOCKET	3:23-CV-1363 (DJS)
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	After the court remanded Plaintiff's Social Security disability-benefits case pursuant to a stipulation and the Administrative Law Judge awarded benefits on remand, Plaintiff's counsel moved for attorney's fees under 42 U.S.C. § 406(b).
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court independently reviewed the contingent-fee arrangement to determine whether the requested § 406(b) fee was reasonable, including consideration of the statutory 25 percent cap, fraud or overreaching, attorney-caused delay, and whether the fee would constitute a windfall.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Unpublished district court decision; persuasive value only.

TOPICS

- attorney fees
- remedies
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Plaintiff's counsel was entitled to an attorney's-fee award under 42 U.S.C. § 406(b).
2. Whether the requested fee of \$15,208.75 was reasonable under the contingent-fee agreement and the governing § 406(b) standards.

HOLDINGS

1. When a court renders a judgment favorable to a Social Security claimant represented by an attorney, it may award a reasonable fee for the attorney's federal-court representation, subject to the statutory limitation that the fee not exceed 25 percent of the claimant's past-due benefits attributable to the judgment.
2. The requested \$15,208.75 fee was reasonable and should be awarded under § 406(b).

KEY QUOTATIONS

“This section “calls for court review of such arrangements as an independent check, to assure that they yield reasonable results in particular cases.”” (Discussion)

“The court “must give due deference to the intent of the parties, but it ought not blindly approve every fee request made pursuant to a contingent agreement.”” (Discussion)

““A requested fee based on a contingent fee arrangement should be enforced unless the court finds it to be unreasonable.”” (Discussion)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff sought judicial review of the denial of Social Security disability benefits and obtained a remand to the Social Security Administration through a stipulated remand. On remand, the Administrative Law Judge awarded Plaintiff benefits, resulting in past-due benefits from which the Commissioner withheld funds. Plaintiff's counsel requested \$15,208.75 for 31.4 hours of federal-court work under a contingency agreement, and the requested amount did not exceed 25 percent of the past-due benefits.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiff filed an action seeking review of the Commissioner's denial of disability benefits. On June 7, 2024, the court remanded the matter to the Social Security Administration pursuant to the parties' stipulation. The Administrative Law Judge subsequently issued a favorable decision awarding benefits. Plaintiff's counsel then sought \$15,208.75 in fees under § 406(b), agreeing to remit to Plaintiff the amount previously awarded under the Equal Access to Justice Act. The court granted the fee motion.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- *Gisbrecht v. Barnhart*, 535 U.S. 789, 807-08 (2002)
- *Wells v. Sullivan*, 907 F.2d 367, 370, 372 (2d Cir. 1990)
- *Fields v. Kijakazi*, 24 F.4th 845, 854-56 (2d Cir. 2022)
- *Porter v. Commissioner of Social Security*, 2009 WL 2045688, at *3 (N.D.N.Y. July 10, 2009)
- *Eric K. v. Berryhill*, 2019 WL 1025791, at *3 (N.D.N.Y. Mar. 4, 2019)
- *Filipkowski v. Barnhart*, 2009 WL 2426008, at *2 (N.D.N.Y. Aug. 6, 2009)

OPINION

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT NORTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK MICHAEL E., Plaintiff, Vv. 3:23-CV-1363 (DJS) COMMISSIONER OF SOCIAL SECURITY, Defendant. DANIEL J. STEWART United States Magistrate Judge DECISION AND ORDER I. BACKGROUND Plaintiff filed a Complaint in this matter on November 1, 2023, seeking review of the Commissioner's determination denying Plaintiffs application for disability benefits.

Dkt. No. 1. On June 7, 2024, the Court remanded the matter to the Social Security Administration for further proceedings by virtue of a stipulation between the parties. Dkt. Nos. 13-15. An award of attorney's fees was previously entered pursuant to the Equal Access to Justice Act ("EAJA"). Dkt. Nos. 17-18. Upon review of the matter on remand, "the Administrative Law Judge issued a favorable decision awarding Plaintiff benefits.

Dkt. No. 19-1, § 2. Plaintiff's counsel has now filed a Motion for Attorney's Fees pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 406(b). Dkt. No. 19. Specifically, Plaintiff's counsel seeks attorney's fees in the amount of \$15,208.75, of which he would remit to Plaintiff the sum previously awarded under the EAJA. Dkt. No. 19-1 at JJ 2 & 6.

For the reasons that follow, the Motion is granted. II. DISCUSSION The Social Security Act provides: Whenever a court renders a judgment favorable to a claimant under this subchapter who was represented before the court by an attorney, the court may determine and allow as part of its judgment a reasonable fee for such representation, not in excess of 25 percent of the total of the past-due benefits to which the claimant is entitled by reason of such judgment.

42 U.S.C. § 406(b)(1)(A). This section "calls for court review of such arrangements as an independent check, to assure that they yield reasonable results in particular cases." *Gisbrecht v. Barnhart*, 535 U.S. 789, 807 (2002).

The court "must give due deference to the intent of the parties, but it ought not blindly approve every fee request made pursuant to a contingent agreement." *Wells v. Sullivan*, 907 F.2d 367, 372 (2d Cir. 1990). "[T]he requested fee based on a contingent fee arrangement should be enforced unless the court finds it to be unreasonable." *Id.* at 370.

In determining whether a fee is reasonable, a court should consider whether the attorney is responsible for a delay in the proceedings, as well as “whether there has been fraud or overreaching in making the agreement, and whether the requested amount is so large as to be a windfall to the attorney.” *Jd.* at 372; see also *Gisbrecht v. Barnhart*, 535 U.S. at 808.

In determining whether an award would constitute a windfall, the Second Circuit has identified a number of relevant factors including the ability and expertise of counsel, the nature and length of counsel’s relationship with the client, the satisfaction of the claimant, and the uncertainty of the outcome of the case. *Fields v. Kijakazi*, 24 F.4th 845, 854-56 (2d Cir.

2022); see also *Porter v. Comm’r of Soc. Sec.*, 2009 WL 2045688, at *3 (N.D.N.Y. July 10, 2009) (identifying three related considerations). If the court finds the fee is unreasonable, the court “may reduce the fee provided it states the reasons for and the amounts of the deductions.” □□□ at *2.

Here, the contingency fee agreement provides in pertinent part that any fee award under section 406(b) would not exceed 25% of all past due benefits. Dkt. No. 19-4. The amount requested does not exceed the 25% cap, and there is no evidence of fraud or overreaching. Counsel seeks \$15,208.75 in attorney’s fees. Dkt. No. 19-1. Counsel notes a total of 31.4 hours expended on this matter at the federal court level.

Dkt. No. 19-2. This results in a de facto hourly rate of slightly over \$484. /d. This is within the range awarded as attorney’s fees in this type of case. See *Eric K. v. Berryhill*, 2019 WL 1025791, at *3 _ (N.D.N.Y. Mar. 4, 2019) (finding de facto hourly rate of \$1,500 “is not out of line with the corresponding hourly rate of attorney’s fees approved by district courts within the Second Circuit.”); *Filipkowski v. Barnhart*, 2009 WL 2426008, at *2 (N.D.N.Y.

Aug. 6, 2009) (awarding attorney’s fees at a de facto hourly rate of \$743.30). Counsel prepared and filed a persuasive Motion for Judgment on the Pleadings which ultimately secured a remand. See Dkt. No. 9. In addition, Plaintiff has been awarded significant benefits as a result of the litigation. See Dkt. No. 19-1 at 4/2.

Finally, in reviewing counsel’s time log, it generally appears to reflect properly recorded and appropriate attorney work. Dkt. No. 19-2. Defendant does not contest the timeliness of the Motion or oppose the application. Dkt. No. 20.

I. CONCLUSION WHEREFORE, it is hereby ORDERED, that Plaintiff's Motion for Attorney’s Fees (Dkt. No. 19) is GRANTED; and it is further ORDERED, that Attorney Gorton is awarded the sum of \$15,208.75 as fees pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 406(b), to be paid from the amount withheld by the Commissioner of Social Security from the past due benefits awarded to Plaintiff; and it is further ORDERED, that Attorney Gorton is directed to remit to Plaintiff any sum that was previously awarded and received as fees pursuant to the EAJA; and it is further ORDERED, that

the Clerk of the Court serve a copy of this Decision and Order _| upon the parties to this action in accordance with the Local Rules.

Dated: February 9, 2026 Albany, New York Zz, U.S“Magistrate Judge

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