

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR THE SEVENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT,
IN AND FOR PUTNAM COUNTY, FLORIDA

CENTURION OF FLORIDA LLC
PLAINTIFF/COUNTER-DEFENDANT

CASE No.: 2022-CA-0357
DIVISION: 53

-VS-

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENSE CENTER
DEFENDANT/COUNTER-PLAINTIFF

AND

ESTATE OF CURTIS DETTMANN
DEFENDANT

ORDER AND FINAL JUDGMENT AWARDING ATTORNEY'S FEES AND COSTS

This matter is before the Court upon Defendant/Counter-Plaintiff Human Rights Defense Center's ("HRDC") Motion for Attorneys' Fees and Costs (the "Fee Motion") against Plaintiff/Counter-Defendant Centurion of Florida, LLC ("Centurion"). The Court having considered the Fee Motion¹, testimony presented², exhibits entered, and being otherwise fully advised in the premises, hereby finds as follows:

1. This action was initially brought by Centurion against HRDC and the Estate of Curtis Dettmann as a declaratory judgment action in response to HRDC's public records request ("PRQ") directed to Centurion. HRDC filed a counterclaim against Centurion for violation of Florida's Public Records Act, Chapter 119, Florida Statutes. Following a bench trial, the Court entered final judgment in favor of HRDC on its Counterclaim and against Centurion. [DIN 163]. Therein, the Court found that HRDC was entitled to its reasonable attorneys' fees and costs as the prevailing party under Chapter 119; thus, the evidentiary fee hearing followed.

¹ Centurion did not file a response to the Fee Motion.

² Centurion did not call their own fee expert at the hearing.

2. The issues for consideration by this Court are to determine the reasonable hours expended by HRDC's in-house counsel and outside counsel at Davis Wright Tremaine LLP and Slater Legal PLLC, and at what hourly rates.

3. During the fee hearing, HRDC's fee expert, Karen Kammer, testified that she has been a member of the media bar in Florida since 1988, and she is a past chair of Florida Bar Media & Communications Law Committee. (T 41-42). With respect to the media bar in Florida, she stated that "we all know each other." (T 43). Her opinions as to reasonableness of rates and time expended were based on her decades of experience in the media bar, and her knowledge of the professionals who have the expertise to handle matters like this, and who would be willing to take the risk of handling a matter like this on a contingency basis. (T 43). She reviewed the Real Rate Report, which did not list any data for Putnam County. (T 44). However, she did not find that relevant as it would be necessary to go outside of Putnam County to find an attorney with expertise in this area of the law. (T 43)³. Someone "who didn't have to learn on the job . . ." (T 43). She also expressed concern that Centurion dragged the Dettmann Estate into the case solely to establish venue in Putman County in order to "artificially depress the . . . market rates that the attorneys representing HRDC might be seeking should HRDC prevail." (T 19). The Court did not afford any weight to this final suggestion as it is speculation at best.

4. In forming her opinions in this case, Ms. Kammer reviewed the court file, pleadings, dispositive motions, and billing records. (T 18). She also spoke with the principal billing professionals in this case. (T 18).

5. Based on Ms. Kammer's experience practicing media law in Florida, and her prior experience as a fee expert, she opined that the rates requested by Mr. Slater, and the rates requested

³ While Centurion argued against this (and the Court does not agree with the bold statement that there are no qualified attorneys for this area of law locally), the Court does recognize that all Counsel was hired from outside the local area because all parties seemed to believe the same about local counsel.

by Mr. Picard and his team were reasonable.⁴ (T 16-17, 23-24). Centurion presented absolutely no evidence as to prevailing market rates.

6. With respect to the rates requested by Davis Wright Tremaine, she opined that, despite their extremely high level of expertise, their rates should be reduced in order to comport with rates that would be charged by Florida lawyers in this matter.⁵ (T 24-25).

7. Based on her review of the work done in this case, including a line-by-line review of the billing entries in this case, Ms. Kammer opined that the time expended by James Slater in this case was reasonable, and, in fact, he opted not to bill for some time that was compensable. (T 20-22). Mr. Slater's declaration reflects that he expended 145.95 hours on this matter. At a rate of \$550 per hour, his total fee request is \$80,272.50.

8. Ms. Kammer also opined that the total time expended by HRDC's in-house billers, less certain entries identified for removal at the beginning of the hearing, was also reasonable. (T 20-23). At the beginning of the hearing, counsel identified entries totaling 2.3 hours for removal, which would reduce HRDC's in-house billers' fee request by \$1,225. (T 15). Mr. Picard's declaration reflects that HRDC's in-house billers originally sought compensation for 150.1 hours, so the reduced hours would be 147.1, and the reduced fee amount would be \$74,645.

9. With respect to the total hours expended by Davis Wright Tremaine on this matter, Ms. Kammer opined that a reduction in their hours was appropriate, and she recommended reducing their total hours to 142.8 to account for duplicative work. (T 25). Ms. Kammer's

⁴ Mr. Slater's declaration reflects that he requested a rate of \$550 per hour. Mr. Picard's declaration reflects that he requested a rate of \$550 per hour. Mr. Picard also requested rates of: \$550 per hour for attorney E.J. Hurst; \$525 for attorney Hara Fischbein; and \$225 per hour for his senior paralegals.

⁵ Ms. Kammer's declaration delineates reduced hourly rates for Davis Wright Tremaine's billers as follows: \$550 for partner Bruce Johnson; \$550 for partner Jack Browning; \$550 for senior associate Caesar Kalinowski; and \$350 for junior associate Shontee Pant.

declaration reflects that her proposed reductions in Davis Wright Tremaine's hours and rates would result in a reduced fee amount of \$66,040. Based on a review of Mr. Kalinowski's declaration, this would represent a substantial reduction totaling \$33,381.50 or more than 33%.⁶

10. Centurion presented no evidence to contradict Ms. Kammer's opinions regarding reasonable market rates for attorneys with the expertise necessary to litigate this case, nor did Centurion demonstrate that the hours expended by HRDC's attorneys in litigating this case to final judgment were unnecessary or excessive. In fact, the record reflects that HRDC's attorneys, with the advice of their expert Ms. Kammer, exercised substantial billing judgment in reducing their fee request both before and during the fee hearing.

11. Accordingly, the Court determines, sitting in its factual finding capacity, that the following hours expended by HRDC's attorneys, which already include substantial billing judgment reductions, are reasonable and compensable:

- a. 145.95 hours for Slater Legal PLLC;
- b. 142.8 hours for Davis Wright Tremaine PLLC; and
- c. 147.1 hours for HRDC's in-house attorneys;

12. The court also finds that the rates requested by Mr. Slater and HRDC's in-house billers, as delineated above, are reasonable, and the reduced rates proposed for Davis Wright Tremaine's billers, as delineated above, are reasonable market rates for attorneys with the necessary expertise to litigate this matter.

13. These findings are based upon *Florida Patients Compensation Fund v. Rowe*, 472 So. 2d 1145 (Fla. 1985) and *Standard Guaranty Ins. Co. v. Quanstrom*, 555 So. 2d 828 (Fla. 1990) and its progeny.⁷

⁶ Davis Wright Tremaine originally requested total fees in the amount of \$99,421.50.

⁷ See Also Rule 4-1.5 of the Rules Regulating the Florida Bar.

14. Accordingly, based on the reasonable hours expended, and the reasonable rates delineated above, this Court awards fees to HRDC's attorneys as follows:

- d. \$80,272.50 for Slater Legal PLLC;
- e. \$66,040.00 for Davis Wright Tremaine PLLC; and
- f. \$74,645.00 for HRDC's in-house attorneys;

15. The total lodestar amount awarded to HRDC for its attorneys' time is \$220,957.50.

16. The Court finds that a reasonable hourly rate for the time expended by HRDC's expert, Karen Kammer, is \$450/hour. At the hearing, Ms. Kammer indicated that she had been paid around \$5,000, but that figure was not inclusive of additional time spent through the fee hearing. (T 17–18). Following the hearing, Mr. Picard filed a declaration appending Ms. Kammer's complete time sheets through the date of the hearing, demonstrating that Ms. Kammer spent 17 hours performing work on this case. (DIN # 180). This evidence was presented after the conclusion of the hearing without opposing counsel's opportunity to challenge; therefore, Kammer's cost will remain at \$5,000 instead of \$7,650.

17. In addition to Ms. Kammer's time, the Court also awards \$6,070.73 as taxable costs in this case.

18. Accordingly, the total taxable costs awarded in this case are: \$11,070.73.

19. In sum, the Court finds that the fees awarded: (a) comply with prevailing professional standards; (b) do not overstate or inflate the number of hours reasonably necessary for a case of comparable skill or complexity; and (c) represent legal services that are reasonable and necessary to achieve the result obtained.

FINAL JUDGMENT

Therefore it is ORDERED AND ADJUDGED that:

1. Slater Legal PLLC shall recover \$80,272.50 from Centurion of Florida, LLC for attorneys' fees, and \$113.20 for costs, for a total of \$80,385.70, which shall bear interest at the statutory rate, for which amount let execution issue.

2. Davis Wright Tremaine shall recover \$66,040.00 from Centurion of Florida, LLC for attorneys' fees, and \$1,177.34 for costs, for a total of \$67,217.34, which shall bear interest at the statutory rate, for which amount let execution issue.

3. Human Rights Defense Center shall recover \$74,645.00 from Centurion of Florida, LLC for attorneys' fees, and \$11,070.73 for costs, which shall bear interest at the statutory rate, for which amount let execution issue.

DONE AND ORDERED in chambers, in Putnam County, Florida, on 21 day of November, 2025.

11/21/2025 1:53 PM
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e-Signed 11/21/2025 1:53 PM 2022000357CAAXMX

KENNETH J. JANESK II, CIRCUIT JUDGE

Copies furnished to:
Counsel of record