Circuit Court for Anne Arundel County
Case No. C-02-CV-20-001728

UNREPORTED*

IN THE APPELLATE COURT

OF MARYLAND

No. 1234

September Term, 2024

ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY, MARYLAND

v.

BRADLEY WILLIS

Wells, C.J.,
Beachley,
Battaglia, Lynne A.,
(Senior Judge, Specially Assigned),

JJ.

Opinion by Wells, C.J.

Filed: November 4, 2025

A jury empaneled in the Circuit Court for Anne Arundel County ruled in favor of a firefighter, appellee Bradley Willis, on his retaliation claim against appellant, Anne Arundel County ("the County"). Willis claimed he was denied promotions in rank after he sued the County for employment discrimination. The jury ultimately awarded Willis $311,000.00 in damages, and the court awarded $317,016.28 in attorneys' fees and costs of $19,942.84.

The County timely appealed and submits three questions for our review, which we have condensed and rephrased for clarity.[1]:

I. Whether the evidence produced at trial was legally sufficient to support the jury's damages award;

II. Whether the circuit court abused its discretion when it did not enter judgment notwithstanding the verdict, remittitur, or new trial; and

III. Whether the circuit court abused its discretion when it awarded $317,016.50 in attorneys' fees and $19,942.82 in costs to Willis.

For the reasons that follow, we affirm the judgment of the circuit court.

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[1] The County's verbatim questions are:

1) Was the award of $173,000 in back pay unsupported by evidence produced during the course of trial?
2) Did the trial court err in failing to enter judgment notwithstanding the verdict, remittitur or a new trial on damages to correct the unsupported award of back pay?
3) Was the trial court's award of $317,016.50 in attorney's fees and costs in the amount of $19,942.84 unreasonable?

FACTUAL AND PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND

A. The Underlying Case

Bradley Willis was a Captain in the Anne Arundel County Fire Department until he was demoted to Firefighter II, suspended temporarily, and prohibited from a promotion for three years after he was found guilty of misconduct. Willis unsuccessfully sued the County claiming his demotion was racially motivated.

Allan Graves ("Chief Graves") was the Fire Chief of Anne Arundel County when Willis sued. Some time after his unsuccessful lawsuit, Willis became eligible for a promotion to the rank of Lieutenant. Willis scored second out of 100 candidates on the Lieutenant's examination. When a vacancy became available, Chief Graves appointed the first ranked candidate; however, when a second vacancy opened, Chief Graves passed over Willis and promoted the third ranked candidate. Willis became a Lieutenant only after Chief Trisha Wolford succeeded Chief Graves.

Willis sued the County again. This time he asserted Chief Graves retaliated against him and declined to promote him to Lieutenant because Willis filed the discrimination claim during Chief Graves' tenure. A trial on the merits was originally scheduled for January of 2022 but was rescheduled due to Willis' attorney testing positive for COVID-19. The trial was continued two more times due to the circuit court's trial docket. The trial eventually took place over four days in April 2024.

B. Rosenberg's Expert Testimony

During his case-in-chief, Willis presented expert testimony from Joseph Rosenberg, a forensic economist, who testified about the economic damages that Willis suffered as a result of not being promoted. At trial, Rosenberg advanced four possible scenarios to help the jury calculate Willis' damages. Each scenario assumed Willis once again would achieve the rank of Captain at some time in the future, but the first two scenarios assumed he would not advance farther than Captain. The second pair of scenarios considered what could happen if Willis were to advance farther than Captain—such as to Battalion Chief. Under the first two scenarios, Rosenberg concluded that Willis likely suffered $173,077.00 in total economic damages, while Rosenberg estimated the loss would rise to $206,121.00 in the second two scenarios.

Rosenberg arrived at these forecasts by first considering that had the retaliation not occurred, Willis would have been promoted to Lieutenant in September 2018 and thus would have been eligible to take the test to be promoted to Captain in 2022. Willis was not promoted to Lieutenant until September 2019. He would not have been eligible to take the Captain's exam until 2023. That is because, starting September 2018, the Captain's exam is offered at two-year intervals, rather than every year. This caused what Rosenberg described as a "three-year effective delay" for Willis to rise to the rank of Captain as Willis would have been precluded from taking the exam until 2024.

After calculating the losses resulting from differences in salaries and missed promotions, Rosenberg then made adjustments to account for taxes, mortality rates, and the cost-of-living. On cross examination, Rosenberg confirmed that a Lieutenant's salary in September 2018, when Willis was passed over, was $79,305.00 while the salary for a Lieutenant at the time Willis was promoted was $84,015, resulting in a $4,710.00 difference. Rosenberg also confirmed that Willis' base salary at the time of trial was $129,402.00, which was a $50,000.00 increase in less than five years.

C. The Jury's Verdict

The jury ultimately ruled in Willis' favor, finding that Chief's Graves' decision not to promote Willis was retaliatory. After reaching that conclusion, the jury calculated Willis' damages. In relevant part, the jury instructions stated:

> In awarding damages in this case, which is for an alleged failure to promote, you must itemize your verdict or award to show the separate amounts, if any, intended for:
>
> (1) Back pay. "Back pay" means the wages and fringe benefits that the Plaintiff would have earned in his employment but for the alleged failure to promote from September 2018 through the date of your verdict, minus any earnings or benefits that the Plaintiff received from other employment during that time.
>
> (2) Other damages, such as front pay, emotional pain, suffering, inconvenience, mental anguish, loss of enjoyment of life, and other non-pecuniary losses.

The jury awarded Willis $311,000.00 in total, with the verdict sheet detailing their award of $173,000.00 for "Back Pay" and $138,000.00 for "Other Damages." Following the court's entry of final judgment, the County filed a Motion for Judgment Notwithstanding the Verdict, which the court denied.

D. Attorneys' Fees and Costs

After trial, Willis petitioned for attorneys' fees and costs, seeking $394,697.04 in attorneys' fees and $19,942.84 in costs. The court held an initial hearing, where the court made numerous findings regarding Willis' claimed fees and made some adjustments. Those adjustments included capping the hourly rate of one of the two primary attorneys who represented Willis to no more than $475 per hour. The court capped the fees for any other attorney—besides the main two—at $300 per hour. The court declined to award fees for non-attorney work. The court also limited the fees billed to $475 per hour for the two main attorneys on days that they both attended trial and limited the maximum number of hours for one of those attorneys to 15 hours for a single day's work. After making these rulings, the court asked the parties to provide additional briefing to reflect these adjustments and scheduled a follow-up hearing.

The court held a second hearing to review the amended petition for fees and the County's supplemental memorandum. At that time, the court acknowledged that it still had some concerns about the fees. The court determined that 75% of entries were block-billed[2] and made a $13,304.25 downward adjustment to the fee amount. The fees were further reduced by $1,397.50 to reflect a billing entry that the court deemed irrelevant to the trial.

[2] "Block-billing" is the practice of grouping multiple, unrelated tasks into a single line item on an invoice. For example, a single entry might combine reviewing a document, drafting a motion, and a phone call with a client. These billing entries are often long and include tasks that span multiple UTBMS codes but don't explain how long was spent on each task. https://brightflag.com/resources/block-billing/.

In the end, the court awarded Willis $317,016.28 in counsel fees and $19,942.84 in costs—a reduction of $77,680.76 from Willis' original fee claim. The County then appealed.

STANDARDS OF REVIEW

"A party is entitled to [a judgment notwithstanding the verdict ("JNOV")] when the evidence at the close of the case, taken in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party, does not legally support the nonmoving party's claim or defense." *Exxon Mobil Corp. v. Ford*, 433 Md. 426, 464 (2013) (internal quotes and citations omitted). Evidence is legally sufficient to support a finding in favor of the prevailing party in a civil action if, "on the facts adduced at trial viewed most favorably to that party, any reasonable fact finder could find the existence of the elements of the cause of action by a preponderance of the evidence." *Univ. of Md. Med. Sys. Corp. v. Gholston*, 203 Md. App. 321, 329 (2012) (citing *Hoffman v. Stamper*, 385 Md. 1, 16 (2005)). "In a jury trial, the quantum of legally sufficient evidence needed to create a jury question is slight." *Gholston*, 203 Md. App. at 329. "Thus, if the nonmoving party offers competent evidence that rises above speculation, hypothesis, and conjecture, the JNOV should be denied." *Cunningham v. Baltimore Cnty.*, 246 Md. App. 630, 689 (2020) (citations omitted).

A trial court may order a new trial upon a finding that a verdict is excessive, "unless the plaintiff agrees to accept a lesser amount fixed by the Court." *Id.* at 703 (quoting *Conklin v. Schillinger*, 255 Md. 50, 64 (1969)). When determining whether a verdict is so excessive as to warrant a remittitur, this Court looks to whether the verdict is "grossly excessive" or "shocks the conscience of the court." *Cunningham*, 246 Md. App. at 703 (citing *Conklin*, 255 Md. at 69). Because the "granting or refusal of a remittitur is largely within the discretion of the trial court," this Court reviews the denial of the appellant's post-judgment motions for abuse of discretion. *Banegura v. Taylor*, 312 Md. 609, 624 (1988) (citations omitted).

Whether to award attorneys' fees similarly rests within the court's discretion, and "that discretion is to be exercised liberally in favor of allowing a fee." *Friolo v. Frankel* (*Friolo I*), 373 Md. 501, 512 (2003). Further, a "trial court's determination of the reasonableness of attorneys' fees is a factual determination within the sound discretion of the court and will not be overturned unless clearly erroneous." *SunTrust Bank v. Goldman*, 201 Md. App. 390, 397 (2011) (quoting *Myers v. Kayhoe*, 391 Md. 188, 207 (2006)). "So long as the hearing judge exercises his or her discretion reasonably, an appellate court will not reverse the judgment under review." *Christian v. Maternal-Fetal Med. Assocs. of Md., LLC*, 459 Md. 1, 21 (2018) (citations omitted). "[A]ppellate courts should be reticent to substitute their own judgment for that of the trial court unless they can identify clear abuse[.]" *Univ. of Md. Med. Sys. Corp. v. Kerrigan*, 456 Md. 393, 401 (2017).

DISCUSSION

I. The Jury's Verdict Was Supported by Legally Sufficient Evidence.

A. Parties' Contentions

The County contends the jury's award of $173,000 which the jury sheet denominated as "back pay," is excessive and unsupported by the evidence at trial. The County argues that Willis, and his expert witness, both agreed the difference in Willis' salary from September 20, 2018, until September 5, 2019—the period where Willis was originally passed over for a promotion to Lieutenant to the day that he was eventually promoted—was $4,710. The County further argues that the jury instructions defined "back pay" as "the difference in wages [Willis] would have gotten from September 2018 until the date of the verdict, but for the failed promotion[,]" and suggested the jury's award may have reflected a misunderstanding of the instructions causing them to conflate front pay damages with the back pay damages award. The County asserts Willis presented no evidence to suggest he was entitled to a promotion to Captain or that a vacancy for the rank of Captain existed, and therefore, the jury's backpay award was based on speculation, hypothesis, and conjecture.

Willis contends the jury's verdict was supported by ample facts and expert opinion evidence. Specifically, he argues his expert economist, Rosenberg, provided several scenarios to guide the jury's assessment of a damages award. Willis further maintains the County did not rebut Rosenberg's calculations with its own economist's opinion or other contrary evidence. Willis argues his being passed over for the promotion had a cascading effect on his career because it caused him to not be able to apply for further promotions, such as to Captain, for several years. Finally, Willis contends the jury's verdict was not based on speculation. Indeed, the jury's award of $173,000.00 reflected almost precisely the amount of total economic damages Rosenberg projected, assuming Willis would have re-obtained rank of Captain during the remainder of his career.

B. Analysis

Evidence that does not rise above speculation, hypothesis, or conjecture and does not support the jury's verdict with reasonable certainty is not legally sufficient. *See Aronson & Co. v. Fetridge*, 181 Md. App. 650, 665 (2008); *Nationwide Mut. Ins. Co. v. Anderson*, 160 Md. App. 348, 356 (2004).

Here, the evidence produced at trial rose above speculation, hypothesis, or conjecture. The evidence showed Willis was passed over for a promotion to Lieutenant on September 20, 2018, but promoted to that rank almost a year later, on September 5, 2019. As the County argues, and Rosenberg and Willis agree, Willis was denied $4,710 in salary because he was not promoted. But Rosenberg's testimony was more comprehensive than an arithmetic function. He presented the jury with four possible scenarios, all accounting for different earning potentials, promotions, and opportunities Willis missed because he was passed over for promotion, while adjusting those figures for taxes, mortality rates, and the cost of living.

The County takes issue with Rosenberg's analysis chiefly because Willis did not show that a Captain's position was open or that he was qualified for it. We disagree with that contention. Willis was required to prove by a preponderance of the evidence that he merited an award of damages as a result of the County's retaliation. The record reveals Willis introduced evidence, such as the testimony of his direct supervisor who described him as "exceptional" and the fact that Willis had previously obtained the rank of Captain before he was demoted in 2013 for reasons unrelated to his job performance or skills.

Additionally, Willis testified about scoring higher than all applicants in nearly every promotional process, specifically having scored second out of 100 applicants when applying for Lieutenant. The jury was provided with all this information and was free to accept or reject all or part of it in reaching a damages award. Based on this, a reasonable jury could determine by a preponderance of the evidence that Willis would have likely again achieved the rank of Captain and deserved compensation for being passed over for promotion as a punishment for filing a discrimination claim against the County.

The County cites to three cases—without explaining those cases or their applications to the facts of this case—in arguing that the evidence "was based upon speculation, hypothesis and conjecture as to the evidence presented at trial." *See French v. Hines*, 182 Md. App. 201, 236–37 (2008); *Gallagher v. H.V. Pierhomes, LLC*, 182 Md. App. 94 (2008); *Giant Food, Inc. v. Booker*, 152 Md. App. 166, 176–78 (2003). All three cases, however, are distinguishable.

First, although *French* and *Gallagher* both involved claims of insufficient evidence, there was no discussion in either case on whether the evidence was based on speculation or conjecture, which is what the County attempts to use these cases to argue. *See French*, 182 Md. App. at 236; *Gallagher*, 182 Md. App. at 101, 113–14. *Next*, while *Giant Food* indeed held the expert's testimony did not rise above the level of mere speculation or conjecture, the testimony there was so speculative as to be incomparable to Rosenberg's testimony here. 152 Md. App. at 189–90.

In *Giant Food*, this Court found the expert's testimony had an "[in]adequate factual basis, as well as an unsupportable methodology for his conclusion." *Id.* at 185. The expert witness opined that an accidental release of freon (a refrigerant) had caused the plaintiff's asthma despite having little factual information of the incident itself and repeating statements such as "I am not sure what it was. I don't think anybody can tell me what it was." *Id.* The Honorable Judge Sharer aptly noted that "[the expert's testimony] amounts to a 'because I think so,' or 'because I say so,' situation[,]" and "Maryland law makes clear that an expert cannot assert an admissible opinion without an adequate factual basis or reliable methodology." *Id.* at 188.

Here, as discussed, Rosenberg went further than flatly saying what he believed the damages were. He presented the jury with four possible scenarios to guide their calculations. These scenarios were backed with data such as salary projections and excerpts from the firefighter's handbook. The four forecasts were adjusted for multiple factors such as taxes, mortality rates over the years, and cost of living. Overall, Rosenberg's testimony was backed factual data rather than the "because I say so" testimony that was presented in *Giant Food*. Rosenberg's expert testimony, coupled with testimony from other witnesses, provided the jury with a sufficient factual basis for their damages award and was not mere speculation or hypothesis.

Finally, the jury's damages award was clearly reflected by the verdict sheet. The County's suggestion that the jury's backpay award was double counted is without merit as it presents no evidence to support that conclusion. What is telling, however, is that the jury's award for backpay of $173,000.00 matched, almost precisely, the total award suggested by Rosenberg ($173,077.00) in one of his four possible scenarios. This suggests the jury considered the evidence and testimony presented, and their verdict reflected their understanding and intent to award Willis total economic damages. Thus, the evidence produced at trial rose above speculation, hypothesis, or conjecture, and it supported the jury's verdict with reasonable certainty. Therefore, we affirm.

II. The Circuit Court Did Not Abuse Its Discretion in Failing to Enter Judgment Notwithstanding the Verdict, Order Remittitur, or Grant a New Trial on Damages.

A. Parties' Contentions

The County contends the jury's backpay award was excessive because it was unsupported by the evidence, and the trial court should have entered judgment notwithstanding the verdict ("JNOV"), ordered remittitur, or granted a new trial limited to damages to correct for the allegedly unsupported award. The County contends the circuit court abused its discretion when it denied its post-judgment motions to alter or amend the verdict and did not enter JNOV, order remittitur, or grant a new trial. Willis responds by arguing that the circuit court did not abuse its discretion because the jury's verdict was supported by ample fact-based and expert opinion evidence.

B. Analysis

This Court has described a jury's verdict as "sacrosanct" with "unquestioned importance" in holding that the trial court must afford a jury's verdict great deference. *See Emily Blitzer v. Amanda Breski*, 259 Md. App. 257, 281 (2023) (quoting *Buck v. Cam's*

Broadloom Rugs, Inc., 328 Md. 51, 59 (1992)). We have also held the deference that this Court affords to the trial court on the same issue is just as significant:

> [T]he emphasis has consistently been upon granting the broadest range of discretion . . . whenever the decision has necessarily depended upon the judge's evaluation of the character of the testimony and of the trial when the judge is considering the core question of whether justice has been done. . . . [F]or example, . . . "**[w]e know of no case where this Court has ever disturbed the exercise of the lower court's discretion in denying a motion for a new trial because of the inadequacy or excessiveness of damages**."

William M. Butkiewicz v. State, 127 Md. App. 412, 421–22 (1999) (quoting *Buck*, 328 Md. at 57–58) (emphasis supplied).

Here, the circuit court was well within its discretion to find a reasonable jury could have weighed Rosenberg's unrebutted testimony and intended to award Willis $173,000.00 in backpay. The court carefully considered the facts and evidence in reaching this determination. In denying the County's post-judgment motions, the court was loathe to overturn the jury's award when the verdict sheet was clear, saying:

> And I think that the Jury intended for the award to be the $173,000 regarding the back pay and then the other damages I think they intended it to be 138,000. And I think they did that based upon the testimony they heard throughout the trial and once again, based upon the unrebutted testimony of the one expert. If there had been another expert, maybe they would have done something different. But we can't speculate on that front.
>
> I think that I, as the Court, now must base it upon what was presented at trial. **I, as a member of the Bench, am very hesitant to take something away from the Jury, including their determination**. And I don't find that it was unreasonable for them to reach the 173,000. It is notable that if you match up the expert's testimony at the 173,077, I don't think it's uncommon for Jury's [sic] to round. I've seen it happen numerous times on my short time on the bench.

(emphasis supplied). We read these comments as reflecting an evaluation of the relevant facts and a recognition of the deference owed to the jury's verdict.

Because the jury's backpay award was supported by the evidence, the circuit court did not err in refusing to enter judgment notwithstanding the verdict, order remittitur, or grant a new trial on damages. Finding no abuse of discretion, we affirm.

III. The Circuit Court's Award of Attorneys' Fees and Costs was Not Unreasonable.

A. Parties' Contentions

The County contends the award of attorneys' fees was unreasonable under the lodestar method for the calculation of such fees. It contends the trial was "derailed" by Willis filing a continuance one week prior to the original scheduled trial date in December 2021 and then being continued two more times by the circuit court's Assignment Office. The County asserts it would be "grossly unfair" to place the burden on the County to pay attorneys' fees for multiple postponements it did not cause.

Additionally, the County argues the circuit court should have reduced certain amounts of Willis' attorneys' billing, including billing reflecting fees for calls and emails between co-counsel for "strategy"; billing for the work of about eight attorneys despite many of them never appearing at a hearing or deposition or ever interacting with opposing counsel; and instances of "block billing." The County also takes issue with the fact that Willis never provided or detailed a payment agreement. The County maintains that even Willis' second amended fee petition, which followed the court's guidance in reducing fees, contained concerning items such as block billing, vague billing entries, and excess fees for "intra-office communications." Finally, the County contends the circuit court should have ordered Willis to produce the fee agreement with his attorneys. The County claims the contract would reflect the fair market expectation of his attorneys' work to him.

Willis responds saying he was not responsible for the postponements that occurred prior to the trial. He contends that while he did file a motion to postpone the trial date, that motion was effectively mooted because of the Supreme Court of Maryland's[3] Interim Administrative Order of December 27, 2020, Restricting Statewide Judiciary Operations in Light of the Omicron Variant of the COVID-19 Emergency. The two additional postponements were necessitated by the circuit court and not by either party. Despite this, Willis contends that postponements are sometimes an unavoidable reality of trials, and the circuit court did not abuse its discretion by requiring the County to pay attorneys' fees resulting from the postponements.

Next, Willis contends that the circuit court considered all the County's concerns with his billing records, which required Willis to submit an amended fee petition reflecting the court's consideration of the original fee petition and the lodestar analysis. Willis argues that the court then made specific determinations about the County's concerns with the billing, and in the end, the fee award was 20% less than what was initially requested.

Finally, Willis asserts that the circuit court did not abuse its discretion in not requiring him to submit his fee agreement with counsel because such a document is

[3] At the time of the postponement, the Supreme Court of Maryland was called the Maryland Court of Appeals.

privileged. Willis notes that despite the court's ruling, he voluntarily disclosed detailed billing records explaining that the legal representation he received was on an hourly basis. Further, he produced time entries supporting the fees the County was disputing. Willis argues no legal authority in Maryland requires a petition for attorneys' fees to include a copy of a fee agreement. Finally, even though a court may consider a fee agreement, a plaintiff may still recover a fee in excess of a jury verdict.

B. Analysis

The prevailing party at trial is entitled to recover reasonable fees and costs. *See* Md. Code, State Gov't § 20-1015 (2009) ("In an action brought under this part, the court may award the prevailing party reasonable attorney's fees, expert witness fees, and costs."). Ordinarily, the "lodestar" approach is the appropriate method used by trial courts in actions under fee-shifting statutes, such as this one, in determining reasonable fees. *Friolo I*, 373 Md. at 504–05. In *Friolo v. Frankel* (*Friolo III*), the then-Maryland Court of Appeals explained the lodestar approach in detail:

> The starting point for determining a reasonable fee under the lodestar approach is to multiply "the number of hours reasonably expended on the litigation multiplied by a reasonable hourly rate." [*Friolo I*, 373 Md. at 523]. This requires the judge, using his/her knowledge and experience, to determine (i) how many of the hours claimed, in light of the novelty and difficulty of the issues, were reasonably expended in the litigation, excluding those that are excessive, redundant, or otherwise unnecessary, and (ii) what a reasonable hourly rate would be for the services provided. In both regards, we said, the court should consider the 12 factors enumerated in *Johnson v. Georgia Highway Express, Inc.*, 488 F.2d 714, 717–19 (5th Cir.1974), some of which pertain to the value of the work and some to the reasonableness of the hourly rate, but which mirror criteria set forth in Rule 1.5 of the Maryland Rules of Professional Conduct that govern the reasonableness of fees that an attorney may charge to the attorney's own client.

> [ ] The product of that multiplication may be adjusted upward or downward based on the results obtained—the degree of success and the level of success. With respect to the degree of success, if the plaintiff failed to prevail on claims that were unrelated to the claims on which he or she succeeded, work done on the unsuccessful claims ordinarily cannot be deemed to have been expended in pursuit of the successful claim. That may be ameliorated by the level of success, however. If the attorney achieved "exceptional success" some of those hours expended on unsuccessful claims may be counted and, indeed, the award may be enhanced. On the other hand, if the plaintiff achieved only partial or limited success, hours times rate may turn out to be excessive.

438 Md. 304, 319–20 (2014).

The 12 factors to be considered by courts applying the lodestar approach are: "(1) the time and labor required; (2) the novelty and difficulty of the questions; (3) the skill requisite to perform the legal service properly; (4) the preclusion of other employment by the attorney due to acceptance of the case; (5) the customary fee; (6) whether the fee is fixed or contingent; (7) time limitations imposed by the client or the circumstances; (8) the amount involved and the results obtained; (9) the experience, reputation, and ability of the attorneys; (10) the 'undesirability' of the case; (11) the nature and length of the professional relationship with the client; and (12) awards in similar cases." *Cong. Hotel Corp. v. Mervis Diamond Corp.*, 200 Md. App. 489, 503 (2011) (quoting *Monmouth Meadows Homeowners Ass'n., Inc. v. Hamilton*, 416 Md. 325, 334 (2010)).

Our Supreme Court has held that when applying the lodestar factors, "it is necessarily incumbent upon the trial judge to give a clear explanation of the factors he or she employed in arriving at the end result." *Friolo I*, 373 Md. at 505. We have found a trial court abused its discretion when it did not offer a basis for choosing a particular award or declining to do so. *See Pinnacle Grp., LLC v. Kelly*, 235 Md. App. 436, 483 (2018) (finding the trial court abused its discretion where it gave no reasoning for denying approximately 400 hours of attorneys' fees in employee overtime action).

Here, the court not only applied the lodestar factors but also explained in detail the reasoning for the awarded fees based on those factors. At the July 22, 2024 motions hearing, the court heard arguments from both parties on Willis' petition for attorneys' fees. At that point, Willis' petition asked for $394,697.04 in attorneys' fees and $19,942.84 in costs. Before ruling on the petition, the court conducted a lodestar analysis and stated, "[a]nd adjustments, . . . there will be a downward adjustment. And the downward adjustment is taking into consideration the step two to the lodestar approach, taking into consideration all the information the [c]ourt has regarding the factors in step two."

The court discussed in detail with the parties where adjustments were necessary, including capping one of the two main attorneys' rates to $475 an hour, keeping the other attorney's rate at $300 an hour, and capping any other attorney who contributed to Willis' case at a rate no higher than $300 an hour. The court declined to award fees for the work of non-attorneys. To prevent the two main attorneys from double billing, the court capped the billing rate for the two of them at $475 an hour on days that both attorneys attended trial (rather than allowing both attorneys to bill individually for each day of trial). Finally, in response to the County's concern that one of Willis' attorneys had billed for a 20-hour day and another 21-hour day, the court only allowed billing a maximum of 15 hours per day for any attorney. After those adjustments, the attorneys' fees award totaled approximately $331,718.03. The court then requested Willis submit an amended petition reflecting these directives, and the court held an additional motions hearing on August 15, 2024, to rule on that amended petition.

There, the court heard each party's arguments and awarded a number reflecting the court's application of the lodestar factors to the modified fees from the previous hearing while considering any new concerns the parties raised. The court concluded, saying:

> So, here's going to be my ruling. And by the way, my ruling incorporates everything I said last time, you know, all my discussion previously regarding lodestar. I looked at the memorandums. I've looked at the very thick packet of bills[ ] . . . . I am going to make some further adjustment. You know, and I recognize the block billing. My whole career, I billed. I always was a private practice attorney. So, I recognize sometimes it just almost makes more sense. But I do think some things, you know, do get pulled together. And I'm also concerned about some overlap. So, my adjustment on that was basically I gave credit for that amount of 75 percent would be – and so, a 25 percent reduction; 75 percent still provided. That means a reduction of $13,304.25.
>
> I hear you, Ms. Marshall, on the $1,397.50. I don't think that should have been there. So, you take those two things out. The total award for attorney's fees based upon my previous statements and based upon statements I've just made and considering all the lodestar factors, will be $317,016.28. And also, the costs of $19,942.84.

Unlike the judge in *Kelly* who merely "indicated the 197 hours for which [the court] would be awarding fees" without addressing "why it did not award fees for the roughly 400 other hours for which [the prevailing party] sought compensation," 235 Md. App. at 483, the court here detailed its reasoning for reducing attorneys' fees and why it was awarding fees in certain instances but not others. This is reflected in the court's discussion explaining why it was and was not awarding a specific amount for instances of block-billing.

Finally, the County's argument that the circuit court should have ordered Willis to produce the fee agreement is unavailing. While it is true that a fee agreement could be helpful in determining a reasonable attorneys' fees award, we find no appellate or statutory authority requiring a court to order such a production. Here, even though Willis did not produce the fee agreement with his attorneys, he did produce detailed billing records and evidence that the attorneys represented him on an hourly fee basis. Here, the trial judge was able to consider that evidence, as well as the lodestar factors, to properly exercise his discretion in determining the fees award. On this basis, we affirm.

THE JUDGMENT OF THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY IS AFFIRMED. APPELLANT TO PAY THE COSTS.