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DISTRICT III

November 11, 2025

To:

Hon. Steven H. Gibbs
Circuit Court Judge
Electronic Notice

Randi Ann McVinnie
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Nathan A. Liedl
Clerk of Circuit Court
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Jason Michael Vold
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Menomonie, WI 54751

Lynn Kristine Lodahl
Electronic Notice

You are hereby notified that the Court has entered the following opinion and order:

2023AP955

Jason Michael Vold v. Circuit Court for Chippewa County
(L. C. No. 2011PA21PJ)

Before Stark, P.J., Hruz, and Gill, JJ.

Summary disposition orders may not be cited in any court of this state as precedent or authority, except for the limited purposes specified in WIS. STAT. RULE 809.23(3).

Jason Michael Vold, pro se, appeals a judgment against him for one-half of the outstanding guardian ad litem (GAL) fees in this long-running paternity action. Vold challenges the judgment on the grounds that: (1) the GAL engaged in misconduct; (2) the invoice shows two instances of double billing; and (3) he never received notice of or was provided a hearing about the GAL fee issue. Based on our review of the briefs and record, we conclude at conference that

this case is appropriate for summary disposition. *See* WIS. STAT. RULE 809.21 (2023-24).¹ We affirm.

In April 2022, the parties signed a stipulated custody and placement agreement providing that they would “share equally in the [GAL] fees to Attorney Deborah Asher.” On March 2, 2023, Asher filed a claim for legal services showing that each party still owed her \$1,722.50. After the circuit court approved the claim, on March 17, 2023, the clerk mailed Vold a “Final Notice” regarding the amount he owed.² The letter stated that Vold must pay \$1,722.50 by April 17, 2023, or be subject to enforcement measures.

On April 17, 2023, Vold sent a letter to the circuit court objecting to the GAL fees. He contended that: (1) the GAL double billed the parties two times; and (2) the GAL spent too much time communicating with, and thus favoring, the mother over Vold. Vold argued the GAL did a poor job, and he stated, “I am not willing to pay the entire \$1,722.50 as I do not feel that [the GAL] upheld the guidelines that [GALs] are to follow.” Vold did not explicitly request a hearing, but he did not pay the bill.

On May 11, 2023, the clerk of the circuit court, acting under WIS. STAT. § 814.10(1), docketed a civil judgment for \$1,722.50 plus costs against Vold for the unpaid GAL fees. Vold filed a timely notice of appeal.

¹ All references to the Wisconsin Statutes are to the 2023-24 version.

² The document referenced by the parties is not in the record. However, both parties agree that Vold was mailed the final notice and they agree as to its contents.

As an initial matter, we address the State’s argument that Vold forfeited his right to challenge the fees. Regardless of whether Vold forfeited his right to challenge the fees because he did not make a sufficiently formal request for a hearing, we invoke our discretion to consider his arguments.³ “The forfeiture rule is a rule of judicial administration, and thus a reviewing court may disregard a forfeiture and address the merits of an unpreserved issue in an appropriate case.” *State v. Counihan*, 2020 WI 12, ¶27, 390 Wis. 2d 172, 938 N.W.2d 530.

As to the merits, the reasonableness and allocation of GAL fees is committed to the circuit court’s discretion. *See* WIS. STAT. § 767.407(6); *Lofthus v. Lofthus*, 2004 WI App 65, ¶33, 270 Wis. 2d 515, 678 N.W.2d 393. We may independently search the record to determine whether reasons exist to support the court’s determination. *Lofthus*, 270 Wis. 2d 515, ¶33.

Vold complains about the work done by the GAL. He points to the fact that the GAL billed for preparation for a video meeting with the mother, while the GAL had no such meeting with him. He contends the GAL spent more time talking to the mother than to him, and he questions the GAL’s decision to allow the mother visitation on a particular day.

The problem with Vold’s arguments is that he does not explain *why*, in light of his unqualified agreement to share equally in the GAL fees, the bill submitted by the GAL was

³ Vold stipulated to paying one-half of the GAL fees, and he is bound by that agreement. A litigant who has stipulated to paying GAL fees retains the right to object to the validity, reasonableness, and/or amount of the fees once presented to him or her. *See* WIS. STAT. § 767.407(4m). As a matter of common sense, such a challenge is not ripe until the GAL submits his or her fees and related billing statements. The State characterizes Vold’s April 17 letter as a simple refusal to pay, and it argues that he did not ask the court to schedule a fee review hearing and, thus, has forfeited his right to review.

Given Vold’s pro se status, we conclude that his letter was an adequate objection to the fees under WIS. STAT. § 767.407(4m). The statute requires nothing more than “a request” by a party, and we conclude that his letter was such a request. Therefore, we decline to apply forfeiture to Vold’s arguments.

inappropriate or unfair to him, which is the issue before this court. Because Vold has not developed an argument that the billing by the GAL was inappropriate with regard to these complaints, we will not discuss them further. *State v. Pettit*, 171 Wis. 2d 627, 646, 492 N.W.2d 633 (Ct. App. 1992) (we may decline to review arguments that are supported by only general statements and not adequately developed). The mere fact that the billing may reflect that the GAL spent more time discussing the case with the mother does not mean the billing was unfair or inappropriate to Vold.

Vold's double-billing claim rests on two pairs of entries from January 27, 2021, and November 22, 2021. On January 27, the GAL had two separate \$17 entries for reviewing email/correspondence with the mother, for a total of \$34. On November 22, the GAL had two separate \$25 entries for reviewing email/correspondence with the mother, for a total of \$50. Each entry is documented in consistent .17- or .25-hour increments at the undisputed \$100 hourly rate. Duplicate entries for the same type of work on a particular day does not mean that double billing occurred. Attorneys can, and often do, have multiple communications with a person on the same day and sometimes for the same amount of time. In short, Vold's claim of double billing is unsupported.

As for the absence of a hearing regarding the requested fees, Vold identifies no mathematical or legal error in the court-approved amount. Therefore, any procedural lapse was harmless under WIS. STAT. § 805.18(2), the harmless error statute. The record shows that the circuit court considered the GAL's detailed invoice and the parties' long-standing obligation to divide the charges equally. Given Vold's prior stipulation to share the fees equally with the mother of his child, his failure to formally request a hearing, and the information in the invoice,

the court reasonably exercised its discretion in entering judgment against Vold for his share of the unpaid fees without conducting a hearing.

Upon the foregoing,

IT IS ORDERED that the judgment is summarily affirmed. WIS. STAT. RULE 809.21.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that this summary disposition order will not be published.

Samuel A. Christensen
Clerk of Court of Appeals