

ATTORNEY/CLIENT RELATIONS

This pamphlet answers frequently asked questions about fee arrangements and the rights of clients in Georgia. The information contained in this pamphlet is general in nature. You should make an appointment with an attorney for information and advice about your particular situation.

HOW DO I CHOOSE A LAWYER?

Law firms, like any other business, often have differing areas of expertise. In addition, the fees charged for legal services can vary greatly from law firm to law firm. To make an informed decision about which attorney to select to represent your interests, you should compare firms. Comparisons can be made by asking your friends, using the yellow pages of the local phone directory, or checking with the Base Legal Assistance Office. Interview several people before you decide on the attorney who will represent you.

WHAT ABOUT THE FIRST MEETING WITH THE LAWYER?

The first time you meet with a lawyer, you should be prepared to discuss and ask questions in regards to the facts and any legal problems pertaining to these facts. Do not be shy or intimidated by the lawyer or his/her offices.

WHAT DO I NEED TO LOOK FOR?

Of course, you will want an attorney who exhibits professionalism and who will charge reasonable fees for his or her professional knowledge. Listed below are some additional considerations you may want to take into account when making your choice. These lists are not exhaustive but they do give you an idea of what you can expect to encounter.

A professional attorney will be one who:

1. Is capable of handling your case. This means that the attorney has the knowledge and resources necessary to provide you with competent legal representation.
2. Represents you zealously and seeks any lawful means to present or defend your case.
3. Preserves your confidences, secrets, or statements revealed in the course of the attorney-client relationship.
4. Gives you the right to make the ultimate decision on the objectives pursued in your case.
5. Shows you courtesy and consideration at all times.
6. Is willing to answer any questions that you might have and explain the law and how it affects your case.

7. Exercises independent professional judgment on your behalf, free from compromising influence.
8. Informs you periodically about the status of your case, and, at your request, gives you copies of documents prepared.
9. Returns your telephone calls in a timely manner.
10. Exhibits the highest degree of ethical conduct.
11. Refers you to other legal counsel if he or she cannot properly represent you.

HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

You are also entitled to an attorney who charges a reasonable fee and who will tell you, in advance of being hired and upon your request, the basis of that fee. Fee arrangement considerations include the following:

1. Call in advance to discover the cost, if any, of an initial consultation.
2. You may discuss the proposed fee and the rate or percentage of fees with your attorney.
3. Ask about the expenses, not including fees, involved in a case like yours. (i.e. copying costs and mailing costs, court filing fees)
4. No law states that an attorney must charge a set fee or percentage of money recovered in a case.
5. The attorney should offer an estimate of future costs.
6. You are entitled to know how much money has been spent as your case progresses.
7. If you choose to pay your attorney with a contingent fee, the contingent fee contract must be in writing.
8. You have three business days to reconsider or cancel a contingent fee contract.
9. Before the contingent fee contract is signed, the attorney must tell you if he or she plans to handle the case alone or with the assistance of other attorneys.
10. If the attorney refers your case to another attorney, he or she must inform you of the fee-sharing arrangement.
11. Before paying a bill, you are entitled to a closing statement, which lists all financial details of the case.

12. There are three (3) kinds of attorney fees:

a. The Hourly Fee: You pay your attorney by the hour. Ask the smallest fraction of an hour that he/she will break it down to.

b. The Flat Fee: Covers the entire cost of handling the legal matter. Maybe the best deal for routine matters such as uncontested divorce and probate.

c. The Contingent Fee: A percentage of any settlement or award. Usually used in personal injury cases. Ranges from 30% - 50% of total award. Under the contingent fee approach, the attorney would take a certain percentage of your award amount as payment for court fees and legal services.

13. You have the right to contact the Georgia Bar or a local bar association if you believe the fees are excessive or illegal. The State Bar of Georgia is located at 104 Marietta St. NW, Suite 100, Atlanta, GA 30303, (404) 527-8700 or 1-800-334-6865. Or you can access the State Bar of Georgia's website at <http://www.gabar.org/>.

CONCLUSION

The attorneys at the Legal Assistance Office are available to answer any questions you may have with regard to retention of outside counsel. However, the Air Force Rules of Professional Conduct, Rule 4.2, prohibits us from providing legal advice concerning your case once you have retained outside counsel.