

# What Individual Clients Will Push Back On in Your Legal Bill

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There was a time in the not-so-distant past when individual clients (such as you would find in the family law, criminal law, civil defense, real estate, trusts and estates, and even business law fields) had little to no tools by which they could call into question the bills presented to them by their lawyers.

How would they know what are proper billing practices or what types of matters should and should not show up on a bill, much less how much a reasonable fee is or how much time should be spent on a matter? Their best option was to go hire another lawyer to take a look at the bill, a daunting and unattractive strategy for a person already fretting about how much he has to pay in legal bills.

That's all changed for the same reason that most things have changed these days: the enormous amount of information available to all of us online with just a few keystrokes. All an upset client has to do is type in **"how to dispute a legal bill"** or **"can my lawyer charge me for \_\_\_\_?"** or **"how much should a \_\_\_\_ cost?"** and your client is off to the races in pushing back against your legal bill.

Does that mean that the client is right? Of course not. But it does mean that you will have, at the very least, a headache on your hands, or worse: unpaid legal bills and fee disputes. Here are a few of the commonly mentioned grounds for disputing a legal bill as found in user-friendly, client-facing online resources.

## Administrative/Clerical Costs and Tasks

Clients have become hip to the fact that they can argue against inclusion of any costs that do not directly reflect legal work, such as:

- Secretarial work
- Time spent copying, filing, or doing other tasks not requiring a lawyer
- Word processing
- Costs of running your office not specific to the client (e.g. air conditioning)

## Costs Not Reflected in Your Retainer Agreement

You are of course free to create a retainer agreement with your client which spells out exactly what the client should pay for and what costs you will cover as part of your legal fee. But when costs appear on a client's bill that either are not mentioned in the retainer agreement or are not clearly related to an item in the agreement, clients may argue those costs. They may also argue costs that were in the retainer agreement, and if you did an unsatisfactory job of presenting those costs in the agreement or otherwise, you may have a problem.

## Excessive Time Spent on a Task

Again, clients now have the ability to google how much they might expect to pay for a task such as reviewing a lease agreement or responding to interrogatories. What that client might find online may certainly be wildly off-base with respect to what you exactly did, but you should keep this in mind.

## Basic Legal Work Done By Senior Attorneys

If you charge twice as much per hour as your associate, then your client will not want to see that the most simple tasks were done by you at your billing

rate. What is and is not a simple task is the kind of question your client might be searching for online.

## Block Billing and Incomplete Entries

The classic complaint of business clients is now increasingly a complaint of individual clients as well. Numerous online resources regarding legal bills point their readers towards disputing a bill when the legal tasks are not presented as individual tasks with corresponding time entries or where the entries are incomplete, vague, or inconsistent. Automated billing software, however, makes the process of entering in unique and comprehensive time entries as they are completed easy and painless, no matter when and where the work is completed.

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