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Fees For House Calls?

For those of you who make long-distance "house calls" or agree to meet clients at a location convenient for them, do you charge a travel fee? If so, is it your usual hourly rate, or is it a lower travel fee?

Thank you in advance.

Susan K. Ashabraner, Fullerton, California

I meet most of my clients at their home or their location of choice. Whether or not I charge a fee depends on the client and the type of case:

- First consult / meeting - no charge - Flat fee cases - no additional charge; I try to factor in my client meetings into the flat fee - Hourly fee cases - if this is a simple meeting, no major discussions (like perhaps a wrap up meeting at the end of the case or a status update over coffee in a place I had to be anyway), no additional fee; if this is a substantive meeting (strategy, settlement discussions, advice, etc.), then my hourly fee applies, but I don't usually charge for travel time unless it is more than 30 minutes drive and the client is informed / agrees to pay for my travel time

Hope that helps.

Robert C. ("TJ") Thurston, Huntley, Illinois

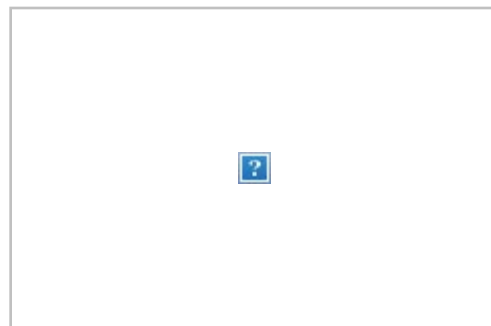
I have a home office, so I do not charge for the travel time. I consider the lost time to be my "overhead" in lieu of rent on office space.

Patricia Williams

Depends on the reason. If it is for the convenience of a client, my time starts when I leave the office and I even sometimes charge them mileage. I tell them up front. IE, a client wants me to attend a board meeting. Or I have a dentist who squeezes his appt with me in between his clients. Or when I am traveling to a court within 25 miles of the office.

If it is because the client is house-bound, or elderly, no. If a client hires me for an out-of-town case knowing there are attorneys closer but just wants "me", I discount my usual fee by 25% for travel time if the court is over 25 miles away.

Melanie Ford, Duluth, Minnesota



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Here's what I usually remind my clients when they sometimes feel guilty about charging or otherwise wonder about billing for certain expenses.

Among other things, you are in practice to earn a living, and a practice is as much a business as any other. Time is money, and one of the commodities you offer clients is your time. It should not be expended without a return (other than for complimentary consultations perhaps). Failing to do that can quickly lead to an unprofitable business with billable hours frittered away.

Danielle Keister, Legal Assistant, Tacoma, Washington

I agree w/this. What other service provides free housecalls; not the TV repair, not the plumber, not furnace repair.

Having stated that, I have not been able to maintain a firm policy, though I am careful in when I consent to go to a client's house. Sometimes I don't charge; sometimes I will include something in the flat fee I quote.

Clarence Behrend, West Bend, Wisconsin

Depends; usually the reason for the client being unable to get to the office is because they are housebound/ bed bound/ hospital/ nursing home bound.

IF it is not terribly out of my way, and IF I can schedule it so it is convenient for me, I don't explicitly charge for the visit; though I may increase my flat fee quote (i.e., from \$150 for a simple will to \$200).

Now, a couple of other considerations:

First, I've long promoted 'ecological marketing' or niche marketing; doing what other lawyers don't. If other lawyers aren't willing to travel to meet the client, then maybe you can.

Second, at least in my practice areas, not infrequently do I get "emergency" will calls- someone who's 87 years old, never drafted a will, and is now dying and wants a will. I make money off of drafting wills, but I make more money off of probate; if I got a potential client who's going to dying shortly, and if I draft the will, I am virtually certain to be hired to do the probate. Record so far is three days: I had client execute will on Xmas eve, Dec. 24, they died on Dec. 27. I had the probate opened by Jan. 10. I'll do a home visit to get the probate.

Third, we are a service industry; and while I wouldn't suggest anyone beggar themselves to provide service, sometimes you have to compromise. If it's not all that far, and isn't going to take that long (i.e., if I can stop by the hospital on the way home) then it's part of doing business and giving service.

Ronald A. Jones, Florida

It was none other than Abraham Lincoln who said: "A lawyer's time and advice are his stock in trade."

Meg Tebo, Chicago, Illinois

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