

**A Maryland Judiciary Production**  
***My Laws, My Courts, My Maryland***

**Title:** *Tips for Hiring a Lawyer*

**Chapter Headings**

How do I know which Lawyer to hire?

How are lawyers paid?

Let's Review

Hi. Selecting a lawyer can make a big difference in the outcome of your case. If you are considering hiring a lawyer you must consider a couple of key issues. How do you know a particular lawyer is right for you AND how are lawyers paid? We will discuss both topics in this video. We will not discuss where to look for a lawyer. If you need that information, consider watching our videos on *Finding Legal Help*.

Let's get started. Your first question: How do I know which lawyer to hire?

**Chapter Heading: How do I know which Lawyer to hire?**

When you contact a lawyer for the first time, they will usually want to set up a meeting to discuss your case. What happens at the meeting may vary, but ultimately it is an opportunity for the lawyer to understand your case better. This will allow them to consider whether they want to represent you and what rate to charge. Your goal at the meeting is similar. You want to know if this lawyer can accomplish your goals and for what price.

Keep in mind when you meet with a lawyer for the first time, you do not have to hire them. In fact, it may be in your best interest to meet with several lawyers to compare the services they offer, their experience, and price. You should feel good about whom you hire, and how they will pursue your goals. Here are some questions you might ask at a first meeting:

- What types of cases does the lawyer normally handle?
- How does the lawyer predict that things will go in your case?

- What legal options do you have?
- Has the lawyer handled a case like yours recently? How often?
- How have cases like yours turned out?
- Will an associate or law clerk do a lot of the work?
- Can you meet this person? What is their experience?
- What hourly rate will you pay?
- If someone else works on your case, such as an associate or law clerk, what is their rate?
- How often will you be billed?
- How often will the lawyer update you? Will you receive updates, for example, by phone, email, or in person meetings?

Now, let's discuss how lawyers are typically paid.

### **Chapter Heading: How Lawyers are Typically Paid**

There are three types of fee arrangements: **hourly**, **contingency**, and **flat rate**. Most lawyers bill by the **hour**, especially for more complicated matters. The lawyer will probably estimate the total cost, but your bill may differ from the estimate if unexpected hurdles come up. If you have a "maximum" amount you are willing to spend, tell your lawyer. This is important. Ask for the maximum to be stated in the agreement you sign.

With a **contingency fee**, the plaintiff's lawyer will receive a portion of the amount awarded at trial. The plaintiff's lawyer is the lawyer for the party who brought the case. If the parties settle instead of going to trial, the lawyer will receive part of the settlement. The lawyer is only paid if the plaintiff wins. Contingency fees are most often used in personal injury cases.

Many lawyers working on a contingency basis will take one-third of the amount you get. This amount is considered normal. Be cautious about contingency fees. You might be responsible for costs in

addition to the amount your lawyer agreed to take. For instance, you may be responsible for filing fees, postage, and copying fees. Review any offer for contingency fee representation closely before you sign.

The last type of fee arrangement a lawyer may use is a **flat fee**. These are used most often in bankruptcy and less serious criminal cases because these types of cases are more predictable. The lawyer may ask you to pay the full amount up front. They are required to put that amount in an escrow account – a separate account to keep it safe. The lawyer will then draw the money out as he or she does work for you. Any money not used must be returned to you.

One last thing before we wrap up. When you hire a lawyer, you will be asked to sign a retainer agreement. This is a contract that sets out what the lawyer is promising to do for you and what they will charge you to do it. Read it closely and ask questions if you do not understand.

Let's review

### **Chapter Heading: Let's Review**

When looking to hire a lawyer it is a good idea to meet with different lawyers. This ensures you find someone who meets your needs at a price you can afford. At the first meeting, ask the lawyer questions about their experience and what they would do to represent you. Remember, there are three types of fee agreements, **hourly**, **contingency**, and **flat rate**. Be sure to get your fee agreement in writing and review it closely before you sign.

I hope this information is helpful. If you need more help visit [mdcourts.gov/courthelp](http://mdcourts.gov/courthelp) for a complete list of resources provided by the Maryland Courts. Thanks for watching.