

## Outside Counsel Guidelines – County of Erie

(Effective 1/1/16)

### **I. Introduction: Applicability and Purpose**

These Guidelines apply to all outside counsel retained by the County of Erie (the “County”) or any of its officers, employees, elected officials, or agents. These Guidelines are intended to ensure that outside counsel provide high-quality legal service and account for their work in a professional and transparent manner, while at all times maintaining confidentiality and remaining mindful of the necessity of conserving taxpayer-funded public resources. Outside counsel will be given a copy of these Guidelines at the inception of an engagement, and will be expected to know and strictly adhere to the Guidelines and to require all attorneys and support staff participating in the matter to also adhere to the Guidelines (e.g., timekeepers, billing staff who create invoices). The Guidelines also apply to matters currently being handled by outside counsel.

### **II. Case Management**

Absent extreme urgency, all filings/submissions must be submitted to the County Attorney’s Office for review before filing (preferably via e-mail unless the materials are extremely voluminous, i.e., SJ motions, in which case the supervising Assistant County Attorney should be consulted). The document should be submitted for review at least three business days before it will be filed/submitted. All major strategic decisions (i.e., whether or not to file a dispositive motion, which depositions to take, etc.) must be discussed with the County Attorney or supervising Assistant County Attorney. Absent advanced written permission, the County Attorney’s Office will not pay filing fees.

#### **a. Initial Suit Report:**

Within thirty (30) days of receipt of the file, an initial suit report shall be provided to the County Attorney that includes the following:

- i. Identification of parties;
- ii. Venue;
- iii. Estimated date of trial;
- iv. Brief summary of the case, including summary of allegations;
- v. Factual basis for claim;
- vi. Information developed during preliminary investigation;
- vii. Evaluation and analysis of liability and damages;

- viii. Brief discussion of legal issues and affirmative defenses interposed;
- ix. Potential exposure (Probable (50%+), Possible (20% - 49%) or Remote (0 – 19%));
- x. Range of settlement value, if determinable; and
- xi. A copy of the Answer and/or alternative pleading(s) shall be provided with the initial suit report.

**b. Litigation Plan:**

A litigation plan shall be provided to the County Attorney within forty-five (45) days of receipt of the file. The litigation plan shall identify each activity proposed and the anticipated cost for each activity, the potential for early disposition, recommendations for ADR/arbitration/settlement; discussion of when motions may be appropriate and their probable success and an estimate of a trial date.

**c. Status Updates:**

Status updates shall be provided on June 30<sup>th</sup> and December 31<sup>st</sup>. These updates shall include, where applicable, a discussion of all significant developments in the case including discovery served and received, status of motion practice, updated liability evaluation and investigation, etc.

**d. Pleadings:**

Copies of all pertinent pleadings (Summons, Complaint, Bill of Particulars, Notice(s) to Admit, Interrogatories, Interrogatory Responses, Motion for and responses to Summary Judgment, etc.) shall be provided to our office at the time they are served.

**e. Depositions:**

Our office shall be provided with copies of any and all deposition summaries within ten (10) business days after the deposition. These reports shall include a description of the witness' appearance; evaluation of the witness' credibility; the witness' date of birth; a summary of the witness' testimony; and the evaluation of the impact of the witness' deposition on the case.

**f. Trial Reports:**

Trial reports shall be provided to our office **sixty (60) days** prior to the start of trial and shall include the following details:

- i. Plaintiff's name;
- ii. Defendant's name;
- iii. Venue;
- iv. Trial date;
- v. Jury or non-jury trial;

- vi. Recommendation of settlement. If so, how much;
- vii. Evaluation of anticipated outcome of a trial, including possible verdict range and/or probability of defense verdict. If so, probable verdict value;
- viii. Injuries;
- ix. Special damages;
- x. Comparative negligence;
- xi. Key elements of plaintiff's case;
- xii. Witnesses that will support plaintiff's case and summary of their anticipated testimony;
- xiii. Credibility of plaintiff's witnesses;
- xiv. Key elements of defense;
- xv. Witnesses that will support defense and summary of their anticipated testimony;
- xvi. Anticipated trial motions;
- xvii. Expert witnesses and their anticipated testimony;
- xviii. Most recent demand; and
- xix. Most recent offer;

**g. Post-Trial Reports**

Upon completion of the trial, a post-trial summary report is required. An analysis of possible appeals or post-trial motions shall be included in your report.

**h. Staffing and Supervision of Matters Sent to Outside Counsel**

**i. Attorneys**

When it retains outside counsel to work on County matters, the County Attorney's Office expects that the specific lawyer(s) with whom the engagement is established ("lead counsel") will be directly and intimately involved in that matter throughout its course, unless the County Attorney agrees otherwise in writing. Lead counsel may not assign additional lawyers to any County matter without prior written approval from the County Attorney, and will not bill time expenditures for such lawyers absent such approval.

The County Attorney's Office expects that outside counsel will not:

- Overstaff matters;
- Shift assigned personnel, except when absolutely necessary;
- Charge for learning time of newly assigned lawyers when a shift in personnel is warranted;
- Authorize premature or peripheral legal or factual research;
- Hold non-substantive internal conferences;
- Submit charges at a rates that exceed the rate approved by the County Attorney; or

- Charge for routinely digesting, abstracting, or summarizing documents and depositions, absent specific tasks through persons who are either over-qualified (e.g., routine document review by a senior lawyer) or under-qualified (e.g., extensive research of general principles of law by junior associates).

The County will only pay for one (1) hour for the preparation and submission of an audit letter.

## **ii. Paralegals**

Examples of activities that a paralegal should generally perform are:

- Preparing first drafts of basic forms and documents;
- Preparing subpoenas or notices for depositions, entry of appearance, substitution of counsel, interrogatories, requests to produce, jury trial demands, and other routine litigation documents;
- Summarizing answers to interrogatories;
- Preparing records requests and subpoenas;
- Proofing documents bates stamped by non-billing staff;
- Summarizing employment and other records;
- Abstracting or digesting depositions;
- Summarizing document production;
- Organizing materials that require professional judgment (a detailed billing description is required- a billing description merely stating “organizing materials” will be interpreted as administrative and, thus, non-billable);
- Organizing and re-organizing files that involve case documents such as separating and cataloguing responses to requests for production of documents (a detailed billing description is required- a billing description merely stating “organizing files” will be interpreted as administrative and, thus, non-billable);
- Indexing file material if professional judgment with respect to categorization is required;
- Preparing and filing UCC statements;
- Ordering searches such as title or legal records searches;
- Ordering public records documents for closings; and
- Creating and organizing binders, notebooks (witness and trial), folders, files, etc.;

## **III. Settlement Authority**

The Erie County Attorney retains sole authority to settle or compromise all litigated matters

under the Erie County Charter and no settlement agreement can be entered into without the County Attorney's prior written consent and approval. All civil legal matters involving the County, its officers and employees require that the County Attorney sign such settlement agreement.

#### **IV. Compensation**

##### **a. Fees**

Compensation shall be paid to the lawyer or law firm for all professional services actually performed in accordance with agreed-upon hourly rates.

##### **i. Prohibition Against Reimbursement for Administrative or Clerical Functions**

The County will only pay for work performed by attorneys or paralegals, and will not pay an hourly or flat rate or fee for work that is secretarial, clerical or administrative in nature, irrespective of the seniority of the person performing the task. Examples of such secretarial, clerical or administrative work include but are not limited to:

- Scheduling meeting and appointments;
- Making travel arrangements;
- Maintaining calendars;
- Filing, organizing or reorganizing files;
- Bates stamping documents;
- Date-stamping;
- Tabbing or indexing file materials (unless professional judgment as to the index categories must be used);
- Faxing documents;
- Photocopying documents;
- Proofreading documents;
- Scanning or coding documents;
- Pick-up or delivery of documents and records;
- Preparing documents for mailing or shipping;
- Ordering vendor services and providing instructions to vendors;
- Processing vendor bills;
- Collating;
- Data processing;
- Notice of filing;

- Organizing files for storage;
- Updating lists;
- Copying and binding documents;
- Inventorying documents;
- Preparing enclosure or transmittal letters; or
- Preparing invoices and discussing billing questions;

## **ii. Legal Research**

Outside counsel must obtain prior approval from County Attorney's Office before conducting a legal research project that is expected to exceed five hours. The County does not pay for online research charges. When seeking approval, counsel should be prepared to address the following issues:

- The purpose of the research;
- Who will perform the research;
- Whether the research can be performed effectively by lower-level personnel;
- Whether the firm has previously conducted research on these or similar issues;
- Whether the attorney has access to prior research on the same topic; and
- The approximate number of hours needed to complete the research.

Outside counsel should not charge the County for routine research. The County Attorney's Office considers any matter of common knowledge among reasonably experienced counsel in the Erie County area routine research. Where circumstances exist that enable counsel to use counsel's data banks, brief bank, or existing work product, counsel should only charge the County for research connected with updating previously researched materials. The County Attorney's Office expects that counsel will use paralegals or junior associates for research matters, and avoid having partners or senior associates devote extensive time to research unless the complexity dictates as much. Counsel should forward copies of research products that are prepared for a County matter to the County Attorney's Office.

## **iii. Office Conferences**

Intra-office conferences that deal with substantive issues pertaining to the matter are reimbursable when outside counsel provides a thorough description of the purpose of the conference. Generally, no more than two staff members should bill for an intra-office conference. The County will only pay for reasonable amounts of time expended on such conferences.

## **iv. Reviewing Files**

Outside counsel shall not charge the County for general diary or status file reviews. Similarly, counsel shall not bill the County for file reviews if an event does not precipitate a file

review (such as a telephone call or receipt of correspondence) or does not result in the creation of any tangible work product. The County will not pay for the review of a file by a party who is merely supervising the work of another law firm employee. The County Attorney's Office considers such supervision to be part of the firm's overhead and already contained in the firm's hourly rate structure. The County Attorney's Office will not authorize payment for a billing charge that states "file review" without more detail as to the purpose.

The County will not pay for time spent by newly assigned attorneys or paralegals to familiarize themselves with a matter on which staffing has changed while the matter is in progress. If, however, the change in staff was made at the request of the County Attorney's Office, the County will pay reasonable costs associated with reviewing the files (unless the request was made for cause). Any billing entry for file reviews associated with staff changes should state that the County Attorney's Office approved the staff change and associated file review and list who approved the staff change.

**b. Costs**

Upon presentation of appropriate back up or supporting documentation, the County will reimburse the lawyer or law firm for reasonable costs and expenses incurred during the course of providing legal services including express mail, long distance telephone charges, postage, and photocopying charges (at no more than \$0.10 per page); provided however, that individual reimbursable costs and expenses shall not exceed two hundred fifty dollars (\$250), unless prior approval is obtained. Costs for travel within Erie County, courier charges, computerized research, and telefacsimile charges shall not be reimbursable by the County.

**c. Retention of Experts, Unusual Expenses and Travel**

Prior written approval is required for the retention of all experts and any expenses exceeding \$2,500 to be incurred during the course of litigation. Additionally, all travel outside of Erie County requires advance approval and travel time for the lawyer shall be billed at one-half the hourly rate.

In addition, for any matters filed in State Supreme Court, the County does NOT have to pay filing fees.<sup>1</sup> Any charges on the billing invoice for such fees will not be reimbursed.

**d. Invoices**

All invoices shall be submitted on a monthly basis and include detailed individual itemized activity(ies), which shall include the date, time unit, the assigned staff, and the value of the unit of time along with a description of the work performed.

The County will not pay for "block billed entries," that is, a line item with a single time charge for multiple activities or disbursements. A time charge must accompany each fee

---

<sup>1</sup> Pursuant to CPLR § 8017.

activity, and outside counsel must itemize each disbursement entry. For example, the following format is not acceptable:

- 10/2/00 Phone conference with Hargrove re deposition; conference with client re same; prepare substantive changes to Answer; attend deposition of Hargrove.
  - o 8.00 Hours

The following example represents an acceptable breakdown of those activities and disbursements:

10/2/00	J.A.	Phone conference with witness Hargrove re deposition (.20); conference with client re same (.60); prepare substantive changes to Answer (3.2); attend deposition of Hargrove (3.00); Pre-approved travel, one hour, to Rochester (.5); Pre-approved travel, one hour, from Rochester to Buffalo (.5);	Hours 8.0	Charge \$1600.00
---------	------	---	--------------	---------------------

Outside counsel should clearly show the total of the current bill and also include a running total for the matter to date. Prior balances or payment history should be shown, if at all, on a separate page. Outside counsel must include with the statement both time sheet or diary detail for time charges and copies of invoices or internal data compilations for all disbursements.

The following are examples of inadequate time descriptions:

- “Conference regarding case and issues”;
- “Review and conference regarding documents”;
- “Telephone re documents and various issues”;
- “Conference re strategy”; and
- “Review papers”.

Submission of bulk time entries that are not sufficiently itemized per time unit and per assigned staff will be returned for correction and resubmission. Reported failure to comply may result in non-payment of charges.

Each invoice must contain:

- i. the County assigned file number;
- ii. the matter name or description;
- iii. a unique invoice number;
- iv. the law firm’s taxpayer identification number;
- v. the inclusive dates covered by the bill;
- vi. the date of the invoice;
- vii. the date(s) of service;



- viii. hourly rate for each attorney, paralegal, expert or other professional;
- ix. Contain the individual itemized activity(ies) as set forth above;
- x. Separately itemize the court filing fees and costs, witness fees, court reporter fees, advances and previously approved out-of-county travel; and
- xi. List the time keepers on a separate sheet.

**e. Approval**

All charges, expenses, and costs incurred in performing the legal services as described herein and in the Agreement are subject to approval by the County Attorney.

**V. Conflict of Interest**

Where outside counsel is retained because the County Attorney has declared a conflict of interest, the Guidelines must be complied with, but the entity/person to whom such reporting shall be made shall be the party(ies) represented by outside counsel or, at the discretion of the County Attorney, a third-party administrator selected by the County Attorney (with copies to the represented party).

The County Attorney does not routinely waive conflicts of interest. Counsel who request a conflict of interest waiver must do so in writing. Such a request must include an identification of the cases or matters that create a conflict and the reasons why counsel believes that a waiver is appropriate, including an analysis of the applicable ethical rules and guidelines.

**Appendix A: Invoice  
Format**

**LAW FIRM NAME**

**County of Erie  
Attn.: Michael A. Siragusa  
Erie County Attorney  
95 Franklin Street, Suite 1634  
Buffalo, NY 14202**

**Invoice # 99999  
Attorney Name  
Invoice Date**

**Matter Name: Important County Matter  
County Attorney File #: 99-20110001  
August 2011 Invoice**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Int</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Hours</u>	<u>Value</u>
8/1/2011	SL	Phone conference with witness Hargrove re Deposition (.2); Conference with client re Same (.5).	.7	\$122.50
8/15/11	A L	Prepare substantive changes to Answer (3.2).	3.2	\$400.00
8/31/11	SL	Attend deposition of Hargrove (3.0); Pre-approved travel, one hour, to Rochester (.5); Pre-approved travel, one hour, from Rochester	4.0	\$700.00
<b>Services Rendered</b>			<b>7.9</b>	<b>\$1,222.50</b>
<b>Costs</b>				
8/1/11	SL	Long distance telephone charge		\$ 3.21
8/15/11	AL	Copying Fee- Answer		\$ 2.10
<b>Costs</b>				<b>\$ 5.31</b>

**Services and Cost  
Summary**

<b>Professional</b>	<b>Rate</b>	<b>Hours</b>	<b>Value</b>
Lawyer, Senior	175.00	4.7	\$822.50
Lawyer, Associate	125.00	3.2	\$400.00
<b>Services</b>		<b>7.9</b>	<b>\$1,222.50</b>
<b>Costs</b>			<b>\$ 5.31</b>

**Current Invoice Total** **\$1,227.81**  
Fed. Tax I.D. 99-99999999