



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Flat-Fee Divorce Comes to Northern California

Bay Area family law practice offers refreshing alternative to traditional divorce billing

Walnut Creek, CA – June 21, 2010 – Divorce is too expensive, fees are too unpredictable, and attorneys pad their bills to maximize profits. At least that’s the general sentiment shared by many divorce clients in California.

According to family law attorney Gary D. Sparks, there is a better way. Attorney Sparks, whose small family law practice has offices in Walnut Creek in the San Francisco Bay Area and in Vacaville just outside the Bay Area, is one of the first Northern California family law attorneys to forsake the traditional “billable hour” model in favor of flat fee (fixed fee) pricing for his clients.

“Many of my clients are concerned about their legal fees,” says Sparks, “and are worried that their family law case will put them into bankruptcy.” He continues, “More importantly, clients lay awake at night wondering how much their next bill will be, or how much that letter, phone call or email will cost. Flat fee billing removes the uncertainty from the process and gives clients the peace of mind and ability to know up front what their case is going to cost.”

Under the traditional hourly billing model, a family law attorney collects an initial retainer or security deposit – generally around \$5,000 – and then bills against that retainer for every hour or fraction thereof. Then, some 14-15 hours later when the funds have run out, the attorney will demand to collect an additional retainer from the client. This cycle repeats until the case is complete, typically some \$15,000 to \$25,000 (or more) later.

On the other hand, under the flat fee model, the attorney quotes the client a fee in advance for the case, and that fee remains fixed for the remainder of the case unless some unanticipated event occurs. But even then, the attorney quotes the client a flat, fixed fee for that additional event. The base flat fee for an uncontested divorce begins at only \$950, while the base flat fee for a contested divorce begins as low as \$6,000.

Sparks explains, “The client’s base flat fee is based on several factors, including the size of the community property estate and whether or not there are businesses or professional practices to divide. To keep fees as low as possible, the base flat fee is quoted based on the assumption that

the case will settle.” However, this is not always the case. “Sometimes a client needs to prepare a motion or defend against a motion and appear in Court. Other times a client may be deposed. Or the parties may need to seek the Court’s assistance with settlement. For each of these events, an additional flat-rate fee is quoted and applies.”

Flat fee pricing for family law cases represents a substantial value for clients and simplifies the process for both attorney and client. But it is important to understand the limitations of flat fee pricing ahead of time to avoid confusion and misunderstanding. Therefore, Sparks provides his clients with a detailed, comprehensive fee agreement that fully explains what is and what is not included.

Sparks concludes, “Clients are grateful that we are able to quote a fee for the case, giving them the assurance of knowing that everything necessary will be done to move the case forward and that the attorney is not doing unnecessary work or otherwise trying to maximize legal fees.”

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