

When you are facing a criminal charge, the legal bill can feel like one more thing you cannot control. A solicitor may quote an hourly rate, a fixed fee, or a combination of both. The right option depends on the work your case is likely to need—not just the headline price.

This guide explains how to compare legal costs in Brisbane, what to ask at a first consultation, and why bail applications and court dates can change the estimate. It is general information, not legal advice about your own charge. Ask a solicitor to explain how the options apply to your case.

What does an hourly rate mean?

An hourly rate means you pay for the time the solicitor and, sometimes, other staff spend working on your matter. The firm should explain whose time is charged and at what rate. Work may include reading police material, advising you, preparing documents, contacting the prosecution, appearing in court and updating you.

Some firms charge in units shorter than an hour—for example, six-minute units. A short call or email may therefore appear as a charge even if it took only a few minutes. Ask how the firm records time, whether there is a minimum charge, and whether administrative work is billed.



An hourly arrangement can suit a matter where the work is hard to predict or may change as evidence comes in. The risk is that the total cost can rise if the case takes longer, involves extra court appearances or needs more preparation than expected.

Checklist: questions about an hourly rate

- What is the solicitor's hourly rate, and are different staff charged at different rates?
- Are calls, emails, travel, waiting time and administrative tasks billed?
- How often will I receive bills or updates about costs?
- What is the current estimate, and what could make it increase?

What does a fixed fee mean?

A fixed fee is an agreed amount for a defined piece of work. For example, a quote may cover advice and representation for a first mention, but not a contested hearing or a bail application. The key is to check exactly what the fee includes and where the solicitor will charge extra.

Fixed fees can make budgeting easier because the price for the included work is agreed in advance. But “fixed” does not always mean “everything included”. A quote may exclude court adjournments, expert reports, a plea hearing, a trial, travel or work caused by a change in the charges. Some firms offer separate fixed fees for each stage.

Ask whether the amount includes Goods and Services Tax (GST), and whether out-of-pocket expenses—often called disbursements—are included. Disbursements can include costs such as a report or transcript. They are not the solicitor’s professional fee.

Checklist: questions about a fixed fee

- Which court events and tasks are included?
- What events or changes trigger an extra fee?
- Are GST and likely disbursements included in the quoted amount?
- Will the solicitor ask for approval before doing extra work?

Hourly rate vs fixed fee: a practical comparison

Point to compare Hourly rate Fixed fee How you are charged For time spent on the matter, at agreed rates A set amount for specifically described work Budget certainty Less predictable; the total depends on time used More predictable for the work included Changing case needs Extra work usually adds time and cost Work outside the agreed scope may cost extra Useful question How will you keep me informed if the estimate changes? What is not included in this fee?

A fixed fee is not automatically cheaper, and an hourly rate is not automatically a poor deal. Compare what each solicitor will actually do. One quote may cover preparation and appearances through a particular court stage; another may cover only the next date at Brisbane Magistrates Court.

Some matters use a hybrid arrangement: a fixed fee for an early stage, then hourly billing or a new fixed fee if the case proceeds. This can work well if the changeover point is clear and you receive an updated estimate before more work is done.

Getting a useful legal costs estimate in Brisbane

In Queensland, solicitors have costs-disclosure obligations under the Legal Profession Act 2007. Depending on the circumstances, they must give information about how costs are calculated and provide an estimate or range. The details can depend on the value and nature of the work. Ask for the costs information in writing, and do not rely on a casual estimate given before the solicitor knows the key facts.

A useful **legal costs estimate Brisbane** clients can compare should identify the work covered, the assumptions behind the estimate, likely disbursements and events that could change the price. It should also explain how you will be billed and who to contact if the case changes.

When comparing an **hourly rate solicitor QLD** quote with a fixed fee, compare the same scope of work. For example, ask both firms to price the same stage: advice and representation at the first mention, or preparation for

a bail application. That makes the **fixed fee comparison** more meaningful than comparing two headline numbers.

If you are unsure about a bill or costs agreement, raise the issue with the firm promptly and ask for a clear explanation. The Queensland Legal Services Commission provides information about legal costs and complaints. There are also formal options for costs disputes, but time limits and eligibility rules can apply.

Checklist: compare quotes on the same basis

- Write down the exact work you need each solicitor to price.
- Ask for the scope, assumptions, exclusions and estimate in writing.
- Check GST, disbursements, court appearances and possible adjournments.
- Ask what happens if the charge changes or the case moves to a higher court.

Choosing a Brisbane criminal lawyer

Look for a solicitor who regularly handles the type of charge and court stage you are dealing with. A lawyer should be able to explain the likely next steps in plain English, identify what they still need to know, and tell you who will do the work. Be cautious of anyone promising a particular outcome. No solicitor can guarantee what a court will decide.

Google reviews can help you form questions, but they are only one source of information. A review may describe a different kind of case, and it cannot tell you whether that solicitor is right for your circumstances. Read for practical details about communication and clarity, rather than treating a star rating as proof of legal skill. Keep your own charge and personal details private when looking at or writing public reviews.

You can also check court information through the Queensland Courts website. It is useful for general information about courts, locations and procedures. It does not assess a solicitor's suitability or replace advice about your charge. For Brisbane matters, confirm the correct court and registry with your solicitor or the court, as the venue depends on the case.

Checklist: choosing a solicitor

- Ask about experience with your type of charge and the relevant court.
- Check who will attend court and who will answer your day-to-day questions.
- Use reviews as one clue, not as a guarantee of results.
- Choose someone who explains costs and risks without pressure or promises.

What to ask at the first consultation

The first meeting is a chance to understand the immediate risks and the likely work—not just to hear a price. Tell the solicitor about any upcoming court date, bail conditions, police contact, previous charges and relevant documents. Do not alter or delete messages or other material that may relate to the case. Ask what information they need and how to send it safely.

Useful questions include:

- What is the next court date, and what needs to happen before then?
- What are the possible outcomes and the main uncertainties?

- Is there an urgent issue, such as bail, that needs attention now?
- What work do you recommend first, and why?
- What is included in your fee for that work, and what is excluded?
- How will you update me about the case and costs?

You do not need to understand every legal term before you go. Ask [wp-config.php database settings](#) the solicitor to explain unfamiliar words and to separate what is known from what is still uncertain. If you are comparing firms, it can help to take notes so you can compare their advice and fees accurately.

Queensland court process basics

Many less serious criminal matters begin in a Magistrates Court. A first appearance—often called a mention—is usually a short court event to confirm the charge, check representation and set the next steps. It is not necessarily the day a case is decided. Matters may resolve by a plea, need further mentions, or proceed to a hearing.

More serious charges may start in the Magistrates Court and move through a committal process before being dealt with in the District Court or Supreme Court. The appropriate court depends on the charge and the law. Cases can involve several stages, so a quote for an early mention should not be assumed to cover a later contested hearing or trial.

The Queensland Courts website has general court information, including locations and some procedural guidance. Court lists and listing arrangements can change. Confirm your own date, time and location using official information and your solicitor; do not assume a search result or old notice is current.



Checklist: before a court date

- Confirm the date, time, court and courtroom or attendance arrangements.
- Ask your solicitor what documents or instructions they need beforehand.
- Check whether the fee covers this appearance and any likely follow-up work.
- Tell your solicitor promptly if anything changes, including your contact details.

Bail and urgent applications: ask about timing and extra costs

If someone is in custody or facing an urgent bail issue, timing matters. Bail is a court decision about whether a person can be released while a case continues, and it can come with conditions. The available steps depend on the person's situation and the procedural history. Contact a criminal solicitor urgently and give them the relevant court, custody and charge details.

A bail application may require quick advice, preparation of supporting information and a court appearance. It may be outside a fixed fee for ordinary representation, or it may be priced separately. Ask for the urgent work to be identified clearly: what can be done straight away, who will do it, what it is likely to cost and whether there are additional court or document costs.

Do not delay contacting a lawyer because you are still comparing routine fee quotes. You can ask for an initial explanation of urgent costs and then discuss the wider case estimate. If you are in immediate danger or need emergency help, contact emergency services. For legal assistance, explain that the matter is urgent and ask what options are available.

Checklist: urgent bail issue

- Tell the solicitor if the person is in custody and where they are being held.
- Provide the next court date and any bail decision or paperwork you have.
- Ask whether a bail application is needed and what the fee covers.
- Get clear instructions about what information family or supporters should provide.

Making the decision

Choose the fee structure you understand and can plan for, based on the work your case may need. A fixed fee can offer certainty for a defined stage; hourly billing can suit work that is difficult to scope in advance. In either case, ask for the arrangement and estimate in writing, and get an updated explanation if the case takes a different path.

The simplest comparison is not "Which number is lower?" It is "What work will I receive for this amount, what might cost extra, and how will I know before it does?"