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Lansing State Journal (Lansing, MI)

September 20, 2004 Monday

SECTION: BUSINESS WEEKLY; Smith Brigham; Pg. 9TAB

LENGTH: 259 words

HEADLINE: COMMENTARY

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BODY:

Don't be afraid to question lawyer on legal bills

By Brigham Smith

Have you ever left a mechanic's garage feeling like you've been taken advantage of? Have you felt suspicious of a mechanic's bill, full

of mysterious terms and charges?

You're not alone.

Unfortunately, many have the same feeling after leaving their lawyer's office.

And they have the same suspicions about their legal bills.

In many ways, a lawyer is no different than a mechanic. You go to each because they have knowledge you may not. And because of that, they can take advantage of you.

You pay someone to look under the hood because you are not sure what's going on underneath it, and because you don't know, you then have to trust them when they bill you.

Trust is the best way to avoid fears about dishonest billing. There is no substitute for trusting the professionals you hire.

The next best thing is to know what to look for in your bills. For example:

* Is the bill sufficiently detailed? It should be itemized to let you see what your lawyer is doing for you.

* Do dates, times, and tasks add up? Have you been billed for a call, meeting, or letter you know occurred on a different date, or did not occur at all?

* Do the times taken for tasks seem reasonable? Sometimes common tasks take uncommonly long, but if you see a pattern of this, it can be a warning sign.

If you answer "no" to any of these three, don't hesitate to ask your lawyer about them. You are entitled to truth in billing practices from the person who took an oath to represent you.

GRAPHIC: Brigham Smith; Honigman Miller Schwartz and Cohn

LOAD-DATE: September 21, 2004