Forensic Audio Services & Fee Schedule

Stellar Audio Forensics LLC provides independent forensic audio examination, clarification, authentication, and structured sound comparison services for civil, criminal, and administrative matters. All work is conducted using established, peer-recognized methodologies, including SWGDE and ABRE guidance where applicable, and conclusions are limited to the data, materials provided, and documented procedures performed. Services are analytical and technical in nature; opinions, when offered, are expressed to a reasonable degree of professional certainty within the scope of forensic audio practice and are rendered objectively and without advocacy.

Effective: 11/02/2026

I. CORE ENGAGEMENT MECHANICS

Standard engagement typically comprises **File Authentication** plus one core forensic service, billed hourly against the retainer. Retainer required and cleared before work begins. Work pauses if retainer exhausted until replenishment received. Any unused balance beyond the minimum is refunded with Expert's final invoice.

Retainer Schedule:

Hourly Rate — $300 (billed in 15-min increments), applied to all core services

Standard (Civil) Retainer — $3,600, of which $2,400 is the non-refundable minimum engagement fee

Criminal Defense Retainer — $2,400 total initial retainer, of which $1,800 is the non-refundable minimum

Expanded-Scope Retainer — $6,000 (minimum $3,600 non-refundable; 3+ recordings OR Sound Comparison OR 2+ core services)

Replenishment Threshold — $1,000 to original retainer level

Criminal Defense tier = all criminal-defense matters appointed, assigned, privately retained, or self-represented (pro se).
All civil matters use the Standard (Civil) Retainer. The examiner may lower the retainer for demonstrated hardship.

The non-refundable minimum applies to client-caused early termination (settlement, withdrawal, conflict-out, non-payment); it does not limit the examiner's discretion to return more of the unused retainer.

II. CONSULTATION

Initial Case Consultation

Consultation -
Pro bono
Preliminary feasibility discussion, service recommendations, and project scoping.

III. CORE FORENSIC SERVICES

File Authentication

File Authentication -
Flat per recording, $1,800 first / $600 each additional
Examination of submitted recordings for indicators of alteration, re-recording, or structural inconsistencies. Standard component of forensic examination engagements; establishes source integrity baseline for subsequent examination work. Methods may include critical listening, waveform and spectral analysis, metadata and container review, file-history assessment, and signal characteristics analysis — applied as appropriate to the source material. Findings limited to what can be determined from available material. Includes oral communication of findings; written work products available separately as add-on services. Turnaround: Estimated 1–3 weeks.

Forensic Audio Clarification

Forensic Audio Clarification -
$300/hour (15-min increments) | Minimum $1,800
Forensic methods applied to improve speech and sound intelligibility where technically feasible. The client receives a processed audio file. Includes oral communication of findings; written work products available separately as add-on services. Turnaround: Estimated 1–3 weeks.

Sound Comparison Analysis

Sound Comparison Analysis -
$300/hour (15-min increments) | Minimum $3000
Applies auditory and acoustic comparison methods to assess whether sound samples — including speech, environmental, mechanical, or event-based audio — likely originated from the same source. Methods may include spectral comparison, pitch and tempo analysis, perceptual evaluation, and critical listening, applied as indicated by the source material. Conclusions are expressed as qualitative professional opinions (e.g., "supports," "does not support," "inconclusive") based on observable acoustic similarities and differences, not as statistical probabilities, likelihood ratios, or absolute identification. Analysis quality depends on recording conditions, duration, speech content, and background interference. Complex cases involving severely degraded audio, dialectology, or requiring formal phonetic specialization may require referral to a forensic phonetician. May require: Exemplar Recording, Audio Clarification, or

File Authentication (billed separately). Includes oral communication of findings; written work products available separately as add-on services. Turnaround: Estimated 2–5 weeks.

NOTES ON REPORTING

Oral communication of findings is the default for the core services above. Written work products (Formal Expert Report, Sworn Declaration/Affidavit) are prepared only upon authorization and billed as add-ons. Formal expert reports, when produced, may include supporting exhibits such as waveform displays, spectrograms, data tables, and visual comparisons, as appropriate to the underlying examination.

IV. REPORTING ADD-ONS

Formal Expert Report

Formal Expert Report -
$300/hour (15-min increments) (Add-on)
Court-formatted written report prepared and disclosed upon authorization of the Retaining Party. Provides structured documentation of methods, procedures, parameters, observations, findings, limitations, and conclusions to a reasonable degree of professional certainty, consistent with professional forensic practice. Includes examiner qualifications and supporting exhibits (waveform displays, spectrograms, data tables, visual comparisons) as appropriate to the underlying examination. Suitable for expert disclosure under FRCP 26 or applicable state rules, motion practice, or trial use. Billed within the engagement at the hourly rate.

Sworn Declaration / Affidavit

Sworn Declaration / Affidavit -
$300/hour (15-min increments) | Typical: $900–$1,500 (Add-on)
Preparation and execution of sworn written statements for court filing. Includes review of case materials necessary for the declaration or affidavit. Suitable for motion practice, ex parte applications, search warrant support, or other court submissions requiring sworn expert statement. Billed within the engagement at the hourly rate.

V. AUXILIARY SERVICES

Case Consultation

Consultation -
$300/hour (15-min increments)
Ongoing technical guidance, evidence interpretation, forensic methodology explanation, and examiner preparation support. Includes calls, meetings, and substantive correspondence requiring technical analysis.

Opposing Expert Review & Rebuttal

Review & Rebuttal -
$300/hour (15-min increments) | Minimum $2,400
Evaluates another examiner's methodology and conclusions for scientific supportability, consistency with accepted forensic principles, and alignment with the evidentiary record. Provides written critique suitable for cross-examination preparation or Daubert/Frye challenges.

Deposition Transcript Review

Transcript Review -
$300/hour (15-min increments)
Review, correction, and signing of deposition transcripts. Retaining Party responsible for transcript costs; examiner reviews transcript provided by Retaining Party.

Exemplar Recording

Exemplar Recording -
$300/hour (15-min increments) | Remote: typically $1,100–$1,700 | On-site: custom quote
Controlled recording session to create forensically-suitable reference samples for comparison analysis. Remote sessions via high-quality video conference. On-site requires travel coordination. Recording parameters matched to questioned material when feasible. Scheduled by appointment.

Priority Scheduling

Priority Scheduling -
Up to 35% of approved project total
Moves project ahead of standard queue scheduling based on examiner availability and case complexity. Does not alter methodology, scope, or level of analysis, and does not guarantee a specific completion date. Specific timing discussed and confirmed prior to acceptance. Applied at examiner discretion; may be declined where acceptance would compromise other engagements.

VI. TESTIMONY

Deposition Testimony

Deposition Testimony -
$550/hour portal-to-portal | 4-hour minimum
Minimum fee payable 5 business days prior to scheduled date. Covers appearance, preparation (up to 2 hours included), travel, and waiting time. Remote depositions require high-speed internet and professional video conferencing setup. Retaining Party responsible for payment regardless of which party noticed the deposition. Additional preparation beyond included hours billed at standard hourly rate.

Trial Testimony

Trial Testimony -
$550/hour portal-to-portal | 6-hour minimum
Minimum fee payable 10 business days prior to scheduled date. Covers courtroom appearance, preparation (up to 3 hours included), travel, and standby time. Retaining Party responsible for payment. Additional preparation beyond included hours billed at standard hourly rate.

Late Testimony Scheduling

Late Testimony Scheduling - +$500 surcharge applied when testimony is scheduled with less than the standard advance notice (4 weeks deposition, 6 weeks trial). Compensates for schedule disruption.

VII. ENGAGEMENT TERMS SUMMARY

The following summarizes engagement terms applicable to Stellar Audio Forensics LLC services. Full binding terms are set forth in the Stellar Audio Forensics LLC Retention Agreement executed at engagement; the Retention Agreement controls in the event of any conflict between documents.

A. Scope

- Forensic examination engagements typically begin with file authentication as the first step in standard intake protocol. Authentication may be modified or waived by retaining party at engagement letter execution.
- Scope expansion or material changes to engagement scope require written agreement between examiner and retaining party.

B. Retainer & Payment

- Retainer schedule and core mechanics per Section I.
- The retainer secures scheduling, intake, conflict review, and reservation of professional time.
- Additional deposits may be requested as case complexity warrants.
- No findings, reports, exhibits, or testimony released until all invoices paid in full.
- Work begins only after payment has cleared and become irreversible to the examiner's reasonable satisfaction. In the event of a chargeback, ACH reversal, returned payment, or other reversal of funds, the examiner may pause work and withhold release of any findings, reports, exhibits, or deliverables until the matter is resolved.
- Engagements may be contracted with retaining counsel, corporate, government, insurance, or pro se parties. Payment terms may vary by retaining-party type. Retaining Party is responsible for all payments under the engagement, including depositions called by opposing parties.
- Overdue balances accrue interest at 1.5% per month. Retaining Party responsible for all collection costs, including reasonable attorney fees, if legal action necessary.
- Testimony (deposition, trial) requires a separate testimony retainer when scheduled.

C. Billing

- ACH transfer and wire transfer are preferred for retainer and invoice payments; business credit cards are also accepted.

- Accepted payment methods: ACH bank transfer (preferred), wire transfer, and business checks. Business credit cards are also accepted.
- Payment processing is handled through secure third-party processors; payment details are not retained.
- All services billed in 15-minute increments unless otherwise specified (e.g., flat-fee or per-audio-minute services as noted in service descriptions).
- Monthly invoices issued. Timely payment required for ongoing work; work may pause on overdue balance.
- Weekend or holiday testimony: +50% hourly rate.
- Travel and major expenses (flights, lodging, equipment) billed at actual cost, no markup.
- Local travel time billed at the hourly rate. Extended travel arranged with Retaining Party in advance.
- Mileage billed at current IRS rate.

D. Scheduling & Cancellations

The examiner maintains limited availability and requires advance scheduling. The examiner will notify Retaining Party of unavailable dates upon engagement. The examiner observes federal holidays and is typically unavailable late December through early January.

Testimony Cancellations:

- More than 5 business days' notice: advance payment refunded; no cancellation fee
- Within 5 business days of scheduled testimony: 50% of testimony minimum fee retained
- Within 48 hours of scheduled testimony: 100% of testimony minimum fee retained

Continuances & Rescheduling:

- A reschedule moves confirmed testimony to a new date; a cancellation ends it with no new date.
- Timely reschedule (more than 5 business days out): $500 reservation fee, credited to the rescheduled appearance.
- Late reschedule (inside the cancellation windows): the Testimony Cancellation tier applies — 50% of the testimony minimum within 5 business days, 100% within 48 hours. Examiner may waive it and charge only the $500.
- If rescheduled testimony is later cancelled, the $500 is retained and the Testimony Cancellation terms apply to any remaining advance payment.

Scheduling Requirements:

- Depositions: minimum 4 weeks' advance notice
- Trial testimony: minimum 6 weeks' advance notice
- Less notice may incur late scheduling fees

E. Additional Conditions

- Retaining Party to provide identification of all parties and counsel involved upon engagement to enable conflict-of-interest verification.
- Estimates provided during consultation may change upon detailed inspection or unforeseen requirements. Retaining Party notified and approval requested before proceeding with additional work.
- Examiner reserves the right to report unpaid balances to credit reporting agencies.
- Rates subject to change with 30 days' notice for future engagements but remain fixed for current matter once engagement begins.

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