

COMPENSATION & OFFER GUIDE | PLAINTIFF-SIDE PI & LITIGATION FIRMS

NY / NJ / Philadelphia Plaintiff-Side Associate Compensation & Offer Guide

October 2026 market snapshot

What it takes to make a competitive offer to an attorney who can run their own cases.

Read this first

The ranges below are **advertised base pay** drawn from public job postings in NY, NJ, and Philadelphia (2025–2026). They are a market view, not guaranteed offers or actual pay. Real compensation varies with firm size, case volume, bonus design, and the candidate’s track record. Use this guide to frame your offer, then confirm specifics for your role.

1 Advertised Base Pay by Experience

Experience	New York	New Jersey	Philadelphia	What drives the spread
1–3 years	~\$90K–\$120K	~\$90K–\$150K	~\$70K–\$100K	Philadelphia entry roles advertise lowest. NJ small firms cluster near \$90K–\$115K; larger midsize NJ firms advertise \$120K–\$150K plus bonus.
3–5 years	~\$110K–\$175K	~\$90K–\$150K	~\$80K–\$150K	Philadelphia: \$80K–\$95K at a mid-size Center City firm (2–5 years), up to \$100K–\$150K plus bonus at a catastrophic-injury firm. NY gap: \$110K–\$130K plus 35% of origination fees vs. \$150K–\$175K at a NYC firm.
5–8 years	~\$150K–\$250K	~\$100K–\$190K	~\$150K–\$250K	Philadelphia: ~\$150K base with \$200K+ total at a trial-focused firm; \$175K–\$250K at an established Philadelphia/NJ firm. NY: \$150K base plus 5% of collected fees, up to \$250K at multi-office firms.
Senior / managing (8+)	~\$175K–\$300K	~\$150K–\$225K	~\$175K+ (limited data)	Negotiated individually. Ranges at the top often include bonus potential and supervisory duties.

Takeaway: the wide spreads reflect how much of the package is variable. Two offers with the same base can differ by tens of thousands once bonus or origination is counted, so always present total compensation, not base alone. Philadelphia shows the widest spread: consumer-facing firms advertise entry roles near \$70K–\$100K, while established trial firms advertise \$150K–\$250K.

2 How Firms Structure Bonuses

- **Percent of collected fees.** One NYC posting pairs a \$150K base with an uncapped bonus of 5% of collected attorney fees, paid quarterly. Simple, tied to firm revenue, and easy for candidates to model.

- **Origination share.** A NY firm advertises \$110K–\$130K plus 35% of origination fees. Rewards business development; appeals to attorneys with referral networks.
- **Tiered settlement or fee-generation bonus.** NJ postings describe tiered, transparent bonuses linked to individual settlements and performance milestones.
- **Discretionary plus origination.** A NJ midsize firm offers a discretionary performance bonus and a separate origination bonus. Flexible for the firm, but candidates will ask for the formula.
- **Semi-annual bonus.** A Philadelphia catastrophic-injury firm advertises a base around \$150K with total compensation of \$200K+ through bonuses paid mid-year and year-end.

Rule of thumb: a bonus a candidate can calculate beats a larger bonus they have to trust. Put the formula in writing.

3 What Wins Candidates Beyond Base Pay

Attorneys who run their own cases are choosing where they can do their best work, not only where they earn the most. These show up repeatedly in what strong firms advertise:

- Real case ownership with a clearly stated caseload (postings commonly describe dockets of roughly 75–100 files)
- Trial opportunities and mentorship from experienced or certified trial attorneys
- A defined path to growth, such as partnership track or expanded responsibility
- Flexibility: hybrid or remote arrangements are still a differentiator, especially for NJ-to-NYC commuters
- Time off and benefits that stand out, such as three weeks or more of PTO and a 401(k) match
- Strong support staff and case management systems so attorneys spend time on strategy

4 Building an Offer That Closes

1. **Define the seat.** State the caseload size, stage mix (pre-suit vs. litigation), and what “runs their own cases” means at your firm.
2. **Anchor the base in the range.** Place it using the bands above, adjusted for your location, firm size, and the candidate’s trial and deposition record.
3. **Pair it with a clear bonus formula.** Show an example: “At X collected fees, your bonus is Y.”
4. **Ask about expectations early.** Know the candidate’s number and other offers before you extend yours, so you avoid a lowball that costs you the hire.
5. **Move quickly.** Strong candidates often have multiple processes running. Compress interviews and decide fast.
6. **Put it in writing.** Base, bonus formula, benefits, PTO, start date, and growth path in one clear document.

5 Common Offer Mistakes

- **“Competitive” with no numbers.** Candidates assume the worst and move on.
- **Bonus with no formula.** Reads as discretionary and hard to trust.
- **Base far below market with no explanation.** If the upside is real, show it with an example.
- **A slow process.** Waiting weeks between interviews hands the candidate to a faster firm.
- **Mismatch between the title and the work.** Hiring for independence, then assigning files under constant supervision, drives early attrition.

6 Offer Readiness Checklist

- ☐ Caseload size and case mix defined
- ☐ Base pay set against current market ranges
- ☐ Bonus or origination formula written with an example
- ☐ Benefits, PTO, and flexibility spelled out
- ☐ Growth path (partnership, trial opportunities) described
- ☐ Interview timeline of two weeks or less
- ☐ References checked on case counts and trial roles

Sources and method: Advertised ranges from public NY, NJ, and Philadelphia plaintiff-side personal injury postings (2025–2026), grouped by stated experience requirement. Postings are not offers, and ranges may include bonus potential. Treat as an informal market view.

Want to pressure-test your offer?

Book a free 20-minute hiring plan review. Bring me your open role and I'll tell you what the market looks like, whether your offer is competitive, and how long it will realistically take to fill.

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