NLSLA

Hiring a Lawyer

Frequently Asked Questions

1 A lawyer contacted me to ask if I would like to be their client. I have had no prior contact or communication with this attorney. What should I do?

Lawyers who charge fees or take part of the money you receive should not contact you out of the blue to talk about your potential case and their services. This is called **soliciting**.

2 Do I have to hire a lawyer if I talk to them or meet with them?

No. You don't have to hire a lawyer just because you speak with them.

3 How can I find out if a lawyer can practice in California?

You can check on the California State Bar **https://apps.calbar.ca.gov/lawyer/LicenseeSearch/QuickSearch.**

The website will tell you:

- If the lawyer is allowed to practice law in California.
- When the lawyer started practicing law in California.
- If the lawyer has been disciplined for breaking rules.

4 Can a notario help me with my legal issue?

No, notarios are not licensed and are not allowed to practice law in California. Notarios can't give you legal advice or represent you.

5 What language should the retainer be in if I speak a language other than English?

If you talked with lawyer about the retainer in Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, or Korean, then you have a right to have the retainer written in that language. If you spoke with the lawyer in another language, you have the right to have the interpreter and lawyer explain each part of the retainer to you.

6 What can I do to prepare for my first meeting with a lawyer I may want to hire?

Before you meet with a lawyer, think about what you want to ask. One important question is, "What is the deadline for filing my case?" The deadline for filing a case is called the statute of limitations. You may also want to:

- Write down the important facts
- Write down what you want to tell the lawyer
- Bring any papers you think are important

7 What is a retainer?

A retainer is an agreement that the attorney will represent you. You can, and should, ask the lawyer to explain every part of the retainer to you. If you do not understand something, ask the lawyer to explain it in simpler words. You have the right to:

- Read the retainer, before signing it
- Ask questions
- Talk about terms like the amount you pay
- Take time to decide if you want to sign the retainer

You should not be rushed into signing something you don't fully understand. You should ask for a copy of the retainer for your records.

If you live in Los Angeles County you can apply for help from **Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County** by calling **(800) 433-6251** or apply online at **nlsla.org.**

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8 What questions should I ask a lawyer before hiring them?

You can ask any questions you want to know. Here are some common questions you may want to ask:

- Have you worked on a case like mine before?
- What experience do you have in court?
- Will you be handling my case or will another lawyer or staff member?
- Can I meet the person who will be working on my case?
- How much will I have to pay?
- Are there other costs I will have to pay?
- Do you take a part of the money I receive (also known as contingency fee)? If so, how much?
- How often will I get updates about my case?

9 Where can I find a lawyer?

Certified Lawyer Referral Services can help you find a licensed lawyer. In Los Angeles County, you can contact the **Los Angeles County Bar Association Lawyer Referral Servic**e: **https://smartlaw.org/** or **(866) 762-7852**.

If you need a lawyer in a different county, you can find a lawyer referral service for that county on the State Bar of California's website: **https://www.calbar.ca.gov/public/find-legal-professionals/find-lawyer-referral-service.** You can also ask people you trust if they have recommendations.

10 What if I need an interpreter?

You can ask the lawyer to provide an interpreter.

11 What if I have a disability?

If you have a disability and need help so that you can take part in your case, you can ask for an accommodation

Tell the lawyer what help you need. It is a good idea to make the request for help in writing.

12 Are there organizations that provide free legal help?

Yes. Legal aid organizations are nonprofit law firms that provide free legal help to people who qualify. Legal aid organizations help people with legal issues like:

- FEMA
- housing
- public benefits
- employment
- education
- health
- immigration
- family law
- consumer
- and other issues

Legal aid organizations never charge clients for services.

You can also find a legal aid organization on the California State Bar website: https://www.calbar.ca.gov/public/legal-resources/free-legal-help