

Advice for Searching for a Competent Legal Representative



It is normal to feel frustrated when looking for legal advice. Who can you trust to help your situation? Who can actually help you and who is only saying that just to take your money? Below you will find advice to help you in your search.

Who can represent me?

For someone to help you with an immigration case they must be a lawyer with an up-to-date license from any state or they must work with a nonprofit organization and have accreditation from the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA). BIA is a part of the federal government that can give special certification to people who are not lawyers but have received efficient training on immigration law.

If someone cannot show that s/he is a licensed lawyer or have BIA certification, s/he cannot give legal advice or represent you. If a person is a *notario* but does not have any other type of accreditation, s/he cannot represent you nor fill out immigration forms.

If a lawyer says that s/he is licensed in Alabama, then you can call the Alabama State Bar, which is the organization that is in charge of all the lawyers in the state. Their phone number is (334)269-1515 and they can confirm if someone is licensed and authorized to practice law in this state. You can also call them if you'd like to file a complaint about someone who provided you with fraudulent or inadequate services.

Questions for your Lawyer or Accredited Representative

During your first conversation or consultation it is a good idea to “interview” your lawyer or accredited representative to get to know them and to confirm that you would like to work with him or her. Below are some questions that can be used to guide your conversation.

Questions to be asked during the consultation:

- What is your full name? What is the address, phone number and name of the law firm or organization that you work for?
- If you are a lawyer, in which states do you have accreditation? What is your license number? Can I see it?
- Have you had your license suspended in the past?
- If you work for an organization, can I see your accreditation from the BIA? When did you receive your accreditation?
- Do you have experience with a case like mine? For how many years have you worked with these types of cases?



- Have you been successful in other cases like mine?

How do I know if I have a Representative or a Lawyer?

To be sure that you will be represented you must sign the G-28 form from the Immigration Office, which has all of your information as well as the person that will represent you. A legitimate agency or lawyer that is going to represent an individual will fill out this form. This allows whatever correspondence—appointments, approvals or petitions for more evidence—that USCIS sends to go not only to the person applying for the immigration benefit, but also the representative or lawyer.

Advice for preventing fraud:

Provide complete and honest information when you submit the application because consciously providing false information or documents can subject you to:

- Denial of your application
- Fines
- Criminal Proceedings
- Deportation



Don't be a victim of fraud:

- Only work with a lawyer or authorized representative
- Know the complete name, official address, and phone number of the lawyer or representative
- Only have your appointments in their office rather than stores or coffee shops
- Keep a copy of the contract or representation agreement explaining exactly what your representative is going to do for you and how much you will be charged. THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT!
- Ask for a copy of all documents and forms from the government
- Be sure to get a receipt every time that you make a payment
- DO NOT receive legal advice from *notarios* or friends. Remember that all cases are different!
- DO NOT sign applications, petitions or any other type of document on a blank page
- DO NOT sign documents that you do not understand
- DO NOT sign documents that contain false declarations

To make a complaint:

If you want to make a complaint against someone who has given you fraudulent or inadequate services, call the Alabama State Bar at (334) 269-1515 or 800-354-6154.

For more information about administrative relief visit our website:

<http://www.hispanicinterest.org/administrativerelief>. If you want to help with an immigration case or search for a lawyer, call ¡HICA! At (205)942-5505. ¡HICA! has representatives authorized by the BIA.