How to Choose a Car Accident Attorney

Choosing a car accident lawyer is easier with a short list of questions. Some crashes involve a single insurer and a modest property claim, while others bring serious injuries, several policies and disputed fault. These questions can make a first meeting more productive, whatever the size of the claim.

Start with the license

Before the first meeting, check the basics. Every state bar or licensing agency offers a way to check that a lawyer is licensed and in good standing, and many also publish disciplinary history. A directory listing or a rating badge car accident claim reflects the publisher's own selection process, rather than a license check or a prediction of results. If the crash happened in another state, ask whether the lawyer is licensed there or will work with local counsel.

Ask about relevant experience

Ask how many car crash claims the lawyer handles, and of what kind. An auto accident attorney should be comfortable with insurance coverage questions, including uninsured motorist (UM) claims, PIP, MedPay and Medicare or health plan liens. Ask how the firm gathers evidence such as crash reports, dashcam video and event data recorder (EDR) downloads. Ask whether the lawyer has taken car crash cases to trial, since trial experience can affect how a case is prepared, even though most claims resolve without a trial.

Understand the fee agreement

Many injury lawyers work on a contingency fee, meaning a percentage of any recovery. ABA Model Rule 1.5(c), which many states follow in some form, requires a contingent fee agreement to be in writing and signed by the client, and to explain how the fee is calculated and whether expenses come out before or after it. Ask who covers case costs if there is no recovery, such as filing fees, medical record charges and deposition costs. Ask whether the percentage changes if a lawsuit is filed, and ask about the written closing statement at the end of the case.

Who will handle the case

Ask whether the car accident lawyer you meet will be the one handling the case, and how often to expect updates. Ask who answers questions when the lawyer is in court, and whether updates come by phone, email or a client portal. If the firm plans to refer the case or bring in co-counsel, ABA Model Rule 1.5(e) generally requires the client's agreement, confirmed in writing, before lawyers in different firms divide a fee.

What to bring to the first meeting

A first meeting goes further when the paperwork is on the table. Bring the crash report, or the report number if the report is not ready yet, along with photos of the scene and the vehicles. Insurance letters, claim numbers and any forms already signed matter as well, since they show who has made contact and what has been agreed. Medical bills and proof of missed work help document the losses so far.

Red flags and realistic expectations

Be cautious of anyone who promises a dollar figure at the first meeting. No lawyer can know the outcome of a claim in advance. Unsolicited in-person or phone approaches after a crash are another warning sign, because ABA Model Rule 7.3 generally restricts lawyers from soliciting clients through ***car accident lawyer*** live person-to-person contact. An automobile accident lawyer can explain which statute of limitations applies. This article is general information and not legal advice.