

Finding Immigration Attorney

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EXPLANATION

Locating a good immigration attorney is important. You will likely spend considerable time and money working with your attorney. As with any important decision, do your research and make an educated choice.

Immigration law is complex and changes frequently. Attorneys, also called “lawyers,” are trained in graduate school and licensed by states to practice law. Most attorneys select an area of specialization such as immigration, patents, wills and probate, or litigation. An immigration lawyer should have a thorough understanding of laws and procedures that pertain to non-US citizens. A good attorney who specializes in immigration law will present you with the legal options that are available to you and can correctly prepare and file immigration petitions.

WHEN SHOULD YOU HIRE AN IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY?

Hiring a competent immigration attorney can help you avoid unnecessary processing delays and many hours of work interpreting Department of Homeland Security procedures, and preparing paperwork and petitions. Attorneys are regularly involved in H-1B petitions for “special occupation workers,” O applications for “persons of extraordinary ability,” and for employment-based permanent residency (“green card”) applications. A lawyer should also be consulted if you have a complicated situation that is beyond the regular scope of your Foreign Student/Scholar Advisor.

There are many situations where a person can successfully file a petition with the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) without the help of an immigration attorney. Family-based permanent residency application (i.e. based on marriage to a US citizen) is one such example. If you decide to file a petition on your own, you may want to pay for an initial consultation with a qualified lawyer to get you started. You must become completely informed about the procedures and requirements of your particular petition type and be prepared to begin early to allow ample time for each step of the process. Begin by visiting the USCIS website at www.uscis.gov for forms and general information.

HOW TO FIND AN IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY

American Immigration Lawyer’s Association (AILA) Immigration Lawyer Referral Service www.aila.org AILA is a national bar association of over 7,500 attorneys who practice immigration law. To access the AILA referral Service, use the web-based search, call (800) 954-0254, or email ilrs@aila.org. Give your name, location, and the reason you need an immigration lawyer. You will be given the contact information of a local lawyer who specializes in your area of need. When you contact the lawyer, mention that you used the AILA Immigration Lawyer Referral Service and ask about their “initial consultation fee.”

American Bar Association (ABA). For general information about the legal system and hiring an attorney, visit the ABA website at www.abanet.org/public.html

Friends and Colleagues. As an international student or scholar, you may know someone who previously used the services of an immigration attorney. Seek out the informed opinions of friends and colleagues to obtain the attorney’s name and contact information, the type of petition filed, and your friend’s level of satisfaction.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU HIRE AN IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY

How long has the attorney been practicing immigration law; how much work is immigration related?

Find an attorney who does all or most of his/her work in immigration law.

How much experience does the attorney have in your particular type of immigration case?

Will the attorney offer an initial consultation before you hire her to take your case?

If so, be sure to find out how much the consultation will cost and how long will it be.

How will you contact the attorney?

Is she accessible via cell phone, pager, email, office phone?

Who will be handling the details of your case?

Will you contact the attorney or a paralegal with questions? What is training, experience of the paralegal?

Who will choose the attorney and pay the legal fees for an employment-based petition?

In employment-based cases, the employer may make the choice about which attorney will be used. The employer may designate either an “in house” attorney or immigration specialist who works for the company or an outside attorney who will be paid a fee by the employer. In some cases, the employer pays and in some cases the fee is split between employee and employer. An employment-based petition will involve you, the employer, and the attorney. Even if the employer pays the fees, you are also the attorney’s client. Do not be bashful about asking questions and talking to the attorney about the progress and details of your petition.

How much will it cost to hire the attorney for your case?

Rates vary significantly based on geographic location, your specific situation, and other factors. Be sure to ask *before* the work begin what the costs will be. In the Pittsburgh area, an H1B petition costs \$1,500 to \$3,000 and a permanent residency (“green card” or “immigrant”) petition can cost \$5,000 to \$7,000.

Will you be charged a flat rate, or an hourly rate? If it is a flat rate, what services does the flat rate include?

For example, if an initial petition is denied, will an appeal be included in the flat rate?

Will you pay before (“up front”) or after services have been rendered?

If you pay *before* services are provided, how will you be assured that you case will remain a priority?

ATTORNEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Attorney Name	Law Firm Name	Phone	Email	Website
Zubin F. Billimoria	Tom Kauffman Law Office (Indiana, PA)	724-357-9990	zfb@tomkauffmanlawoffice.com	tomkauffmanlawoffices.com
Arthur Serratelli Mara Mijal *Art has worked with IUP for many years doing presentations for students	Serratelli Mijal PLLC	757-333-7513	info@smimmigrationlaw.com	smimmigrationlaw.com
Jane Goldblum Karen Pollins Kristen Dennis Maria Elia *IUP uses these lawyers	Goldblum & Pollins Immigration Law (Philadelphia, PA)	215-885-3600	info@goldblumfirm.com	goldblumfirm.com

Free/Discounted Services for Asylum & Refugees Cases:

Attorney Name	Law Firm Name	Phone	Email	Website
Jewish Family and Children’s Service		412-422-7200	info@jfcspgh.org	www.jfcspgh.com
University of Pittsburgh – Immigration Law clinic		412-383-9897	Siv7@pitt.edu	www.lawpitt.edu