
STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

How to Find an Attorney You Can Afford



Low-Cost Attorneys **and Legal Help**

Attorneys are experts in different areas of law. They can specialize in civil, criminal, juvenile or other types of law. Lawyers represent clients in a court of law and give clients legal advice.

The bad part? Lawyers can also be really expensive. Under the protection of the Sixth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, criminal defendants who cannot afford a lawyer will have a legal counsel appointed to them by the court.

What if your legal situation is different? A child custody battle or housing rights case can financially drain you. In a civil case, you are not entitled to free legal representation.

This is where you will have to get creative. Fortunately, there are other ways to find low-cost and sometimes free legal help if you cannot afford a lawyer. Here are your options.

Get a Court-Appointed Lawyer

By law, you have a right to an attorney if you are a defendant in a criminal case. If you cannot afford to hire a private attorney, then an attorney may be appointed by the state to assist you during proceedings.

You will not be assigned a court-appointed attorney automatically. You must request one at the time the charges are brought against you. This is known as your arraignment.

In order to obtain a court-appointed attorney, you must provide viable proof that you are financially incapable of hiring an attorney. The judge may:

- ✓ Ask you questions about your finances.
- ✓ Require that you complete a questionnaire regarding your income and assets.

The judge will also evaluate the severity of the crime. If you are facing a serious crime, then he or she will take into consideration the likelihood of costly billable hours by an attorney.

Therefore, if you make a decent income, you may still be eligible for a court-appointed attorney.

You may also qualify for “partial indigency” if your income is not low enough for a free government-paid lawyer but not high enough to afford a private attorney.

In this case, you may be represented by a court-appointed attorney, but will need to pay the government back a portion of the costs.

In some jurisdictions, state-funded attorneys may be appointed to serve in child dependency cases.

If you are at risk of losing the right to your children, request that an attorney be appointed to you. Many states use attorneys who volunteer in these situations.

Look Into Legal Aid Programs

There are many legal aid programs that are federally funded. These programs employ attorneys and paralegals to offer free services to eligible low-income individuals and families.

Legal Services Corporation (LSC) is an independent nonprofit established by Congress to help low-income Americans get the legal assistance they deserve.

The program provides funding to 134 legal aid organizations in every U.S. state, the District of Columbia and U.S. Territories.

You can find your local legal aid office [online](#) or in the phone directory in your area.

Qualifications for legal aid are based on several factors, such as your income, health status and the nature of your case.

You may be eligible for legal help if you:

- ✓ Have been accused of a crime.
- ✓ Are defined as poor or needy by the court. In this case, you will qualify for indigent representation.
- ✓ Are a victim of domestic violence or fear for your safety.
- ✓ Have an income that is below the federal poverty line.
- ✓ Receive financial assistance from other programs like SNAP and the Older Americans Act.
- ✓ Are an immigrant or other noncitizen.

Additionally, there are legal service programs that provide legal assistance to low-income persons living with HIV or AIDS.

These individuals may receive legal help on matters such as insurance difficulties and housing discrimination.

If you are a disabled U.S. veteran, then you may be eligible for free legal aid through your local veterans association.

Some private attorneys and advocacy organizations even offer free legal aid for cases that have the potential to become a larger class-action lawsuit. For example, this may be against an employer who has several pay discrimination lawsuits against them.



Find a Pro Bono Program

There are many local bar associations that offer free or low-cost legal resources to those in need. This includes lawyers who agree to work for free or “pro bono.”

If you are not eligible to get pro bono representation, you may still be able to get a free initial consultation with an attorney through your local bar association.

These associations also offer programs to help reduce or eliminate legal fees altogether.

In addition to bar associations, you can find free legal aid through nonprofit organizations or private law firms who have pro bono departments.

You can find pro bono work near you online or by contacting your local legal aid office for a referral.

To qualify for free legal aid, you generally have to meet low-income requirements.

Check Out a Local Law School Clinic

If you are in need of housing representation or a criminal defense lawyer, check out a local law school and see what type of services they offer.

Many law schools have legal clinics that are staffed by students who provide services to the local community in exchange for academic credit.

These services are typically provided in many areas of law, including:

- ✓ Family law.
- ✓ Immigration law.
- ✓ Criminal law.
- ✓ Tax law.
- ✓ Human rights.
- ✓ Environment law.

However, some clinics may focus on specific types of legal cases, such as foreclosure relief.

Law school clinics provide hands-on experience to third-year law school students by exposing them to real legal issues.

They are typically managed by law professors who highly supervise their students.

To find a legal clinic near you, look up the different law schools in your area. You can call their office or visit their website.

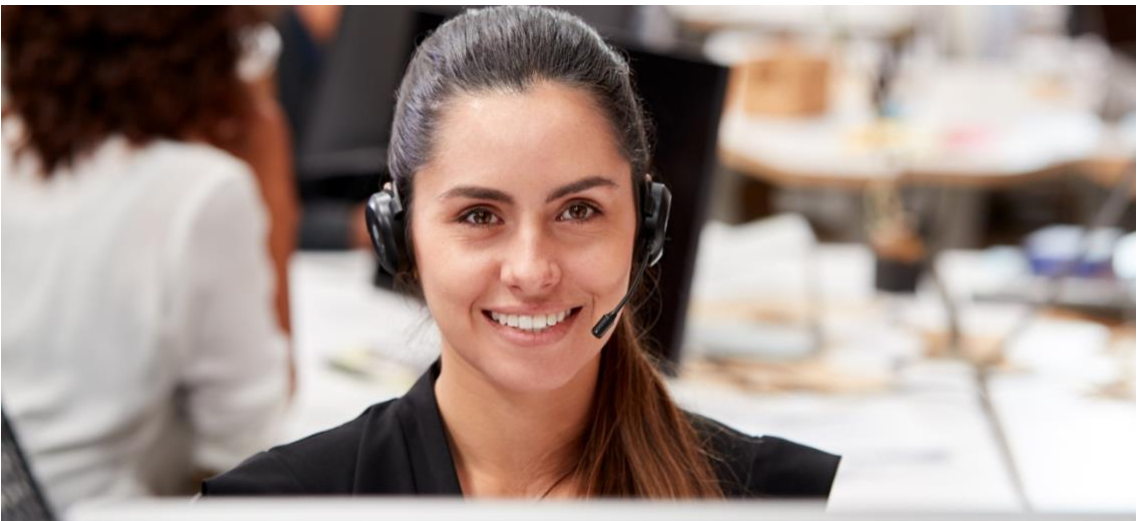


Call a Legal Hotline

If you are simply in need of legal advice, then you can call a legal hotline for either free or low-cost legal advice.

There are even hotlines for specific situations, such as domestic violence and employment issues.

Find a legal hotline that services your state by doing a quick search online. Keep in mind that laws vary by state, so it is important to seek legal advice in the state in which you reside or have a case pending.



Hiring a Lawyer

If you make too much to receive free legal aid, then your only option may be hiring an attorney you can afford.

Individuals with moderate income can hire a sliding-scale attorney. These lawyers charge clients based on their income and ability to pay.

Try to find a sliding-scale program through your local bar association or by searching online. You may be able to hire an attorney that fits your financial situation.

You can also find a lawyer that accepts contingency fees, meaning that you will only have to pay the lawyer if you win the case. This typically applies for personal injury cases.

In other cases, such as divorce or bankruptcy case, attorneys will not be allowed to charge contingency fees. Instead, these lawyers will charge you an hourly rate.

Other ways to save when hiring a lawyer include:

- ✓ Working out a payment plan so you do not have to pay all the fees upfront.
- ✓ Hiring a younger lawyer or a lawyer with less experience who charges lower fees.
- ✓ Paying your lawyer in the form of property.

While finding an affordable attorney is definitely possible, there is more of a risk of scams and cheats.

Therefore, it is important that you keep the following tips in mind when hiring an attorney:

- ✓ Avoid hiring an attorney that has solicited you. Lawyers are not permitted to contact you if you have not expressed interest in their services.
- ✓ Verify the attorney's background and credentials.

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- ✓ Do not hire an attorney who pressures you to make any fee arrangement.
 - ✓ Check to see if the lawyer has any violations or disciplinary actions against him or her through the American Bar Association.

Make sure that you do enough research before deciding on a lawyer you can trust. Do not let your financial situation limit you from getting the proper legal guidance you deserve.



