

How do I Find a Good Lawyer or BIA Accredited Representative?¹

Only licensed lawyers and Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) accredited representatives can give legal advice. Before contacting a lawyer or BIA accredited representative about working on your immigration case, learn as many facts about your case. This may involve talking to your parents or relatives to get information about your immigration history. Gather any immigration paperwork and criminal records you have.

Find legal help at: www.adminrelief.org/legalhelp/.

Here are some tips for finding and working with an attorney or BIA accredited representative:

- **LICENSED OR ACCREDITED? CHECK FOR PAST DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS.**
Is the person a licensed attorney or BIA accredited representative?
 - If s/he is a lawyer, ask in what state s/he is barred. Attorneys licensed to practice in any state can give immigration legal advice. Your immigration attorney may be barred in a state other than where s/he practices. Check if your lawyer is licensed to practice law by using this list of lawyer licensing databases for all states at: <http://www.llrx.com/features/lawyerlicenses.htm>².
 - BIA accredited representatives are not attorneys, but they can give you immigration legal advice. Read more about BIA accredited representatives on the next page. Check if they are accredited at: http://www.justice.gov/eoir/ra/raroster_reps.htm.
 - Check if your immigration lawyer or BIA accredited representative has been disciplined at: <http://www.justice.gov/eoir/discipline.htm>. If s/he has been disciplined, find out why.
- **IDENTIFY AREAS OF EXPERTISE.**
Many attorneys do not know immigration law and many immigration attorneys do not know deportation defense very well. Deportation specialists may be the best lawyers for your case, especially if you had a deportation case or are now facing deportation. If the lawyer does real estate, family, business and immigration law, s/he may not be a deportation specialist. Ask how long s/he has been practicing. How much experience does s/he have working with clients in a situation similar to yours?
- **STAY INFORMED.**
 - Stay informed about your case and do not just rely on the attorney or BIA accredited representative.
 - Make sure the lawyer or BIA accredited representative looks at your documents (e.g. your Notice to Appear (NTA)) before giving you advice.
 - Keep the full name and contact information of EVERY lawyer and BIA accredited representative that has ever represented you.

- *GET IT IN WRITING.*
 - Get a written contract before you give the lawyer money to work on your immigration case. Ask for a “retainer agreement.” Read it carefully. Make sure you understand it. Make sure it contains the same promises your lawyer is making orally.
 - If you have an old order of deportation and are trying to apply for lawful permanent residence (i.e. a “green card”), get written information from your lawyer explaining how s/he plans to keep you from being deported.
 - If your attorney or BIA accredited representative ever refuses to give information s/he promises you in writing, send him or her a certified letter outlining the promises s/he made to you and asking for written clarification on those promises.
- *KEEP COPIES.*
Make sure you get a copy of everything your lawyer or BIA accredited representative files. Keep your copies in a safe place.
- *IF NECESSARY, FILE A COMPLAINT.*
Make a complaint with the Attorney Grievance Committee immediately if you feel your lawyer wronged you. Learn more about how to file a complaint against a lawyer at: http://www.lawyers.com/~link.aspx?_id=03172A52-0986-4FF3-A73F-110A31EA99DC&_z=z and the Directory of Lawyer Disciplinary Agencies at: http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/professional_responsibility/current_disciplinary_agency_directory_online.authcheckdam.pdf.

What is a BIA Accredited Representative?

A BIA Accredited Representative is a non-lawyer with permission from the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) to represent individuals applying for immigration benefits. The non-lawyer must be working for an organization formally recognized by the BIA.

What does it mean to be partially versus fully accredited by the BIA?

Some BIA accredited representatives are partially accredited, which means they can represent individuals before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) only. Fully accredited BIA representatives can represent individuals before USCIS, immigration courts, and the BIA.

Report Notario fraud at: <http://www.stopnotariofraud.org/>

Read more on who can give immigration legal advice at: https://cliniclegal.org/sites/default/files/Whocanhelpwithimmigrationmatters_6.pdf

¹ Adapted from Page 38 of Deportation 101 by Detention Watch Network, Families for Freedom, Immigrant Defense Project and National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild at: <http://nipnl.org/community.htm>.

² You can also check the list of State Bar Associations at: <http://www.abanet.org/barserv/stlobar.html>.

Note: Some state associations are voluntary and a licensed lawyer may not appear as a member of his or her State Bar Association.