How to Choose a Car Accident Attorney

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

Check the license first

Before any meeting, confirm 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 reflects the publisher's own selection process, not a license check and not a prediction of results. If the crash occurred out of state, ask whether the lawyer is licensed there or plans to work with local counsel.

Questions about experience

Ask how many car crash claims the lawyer handles and what kinds. An auto accident lawyer should be comfortable with coverage questions, including uninsured motorist (UM) claims, PIP, MedPay and Medicare or health plan liens. Ask how the firm collects evidence like 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 settle.

Fees and the written agreement

Injury lawyers often handle these claims on a contingency fee, meaning a percentage of any recovery. ABA Model Rule 1.5(c), which many states have adopted in some form, **car accident lawyers** requires a contingent fee agreement to be in writing and signed by the client, and to state how the fee is calculated and whether expenses are deducted before or after the fee. Ask who pays case costs if there is no recovery, including filing fees, record charges and deposition costs. Ask whether the percentage changes if a lawsuit is filed, and ask for a written closing statement at the end.

Who does the work

Ask whether the car crash attorney at the consultation will handle the case personally, 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. ABA Model Rule 1.5(e) generally requires the client's written agreement before lawyers in different firms divide a fee, so any referral or co-counsel plan should be explained at the start.

Preparing for the consultation

A first meeting goes further when the paperwork is on the table. Bring the police report, or at least the report number, along with photos of the scene and the vehicles. Insurance letters, claim numbers and any forms already signed matter as well, because they show what has already been said and signed. Medical bills and proof of missed work help document the losses so far.

Warning signs

Be cautious of anyone who promises a dollar figure at the first meeting. No lawyer can predict the outcome of a claim with certainty. Unsolicited in-person or phone approaches after a crash are another warning sign, since ABA Model Rule 7.3 generally restricts live person-to-person solicitation by lawyers. An automobile accident lawyer should be able to explain the statute of limitations that applies. This is general information, not legal advice.