

Hiring an Attorney

If you are stuck with a car that is a lemon or if an electronics store won't repair the big screen television that you bought from it, you may need to hire an attorney to help resolve the dispute. Legal advice is also helpful if you are buying or selling a home or starting a new business. Attorneys can provide valuable advice on estate planning, tax matters, and marital issues.

Finding An Attorney

Ask your friends and neighbors for the names of any attorneys they have used and would recommend. State and local bar associations provide lawyer referral services. An attorney lists the types of cases he or she will accept. Attorneys participating in a lawyer referral program charge a set fee for an initial consultation. Federal and state legal services provide legal representation at no charge if you qualify under the program's income guidelines. Legal directories list attorneys in a particular geographic area and also categorize attorneys by specialized areas such as personal injury and tort law, family law, criminal law, and other types of law. The Internet contains a wealth of information about lawyers and law firms. There are web sites that provide locator services for attorneys having special expertise in a specific type of law.

Retainer agreements

Retainer agreements (your contract with an attorney) are generally in writing. An attorney may charge a flat fee for handling routine matters like a simple will or an uncontested divorce. Hourly fees can vary depending upon the attorney's experience and expertise in a particular area of law. Contingency fees mean that the attorney gets a percentage of any recovery you receive. Retainer fees are paid in advance to assure the attorney will handle your case. When services are performed, the legal fees are deducted from the retainer. Court filing fees, service of process fees, investigators' fees, and witness fees are all additional expenses that are charged to the client.