How to Choose a Car Accident Lawyer

Choosing a car accident lawyer goes better with a few clear questions. Some crashes involve a single 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, regardless of the size of the claim.

Start with the license

Before the first meeting, check the basics. Every state bar or licensing agency offers a way to check that a lawyer is licensed and in good standing, and many publish public discipline records. A directory listing or a rating badge reflects the publisher's own selection process, rather than a license check or 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.

Experience with car crash claims

Ask how many car crash claims the lawyer handles, and of what kind. An auto accident attorney should be comfortable with insurance coverage questions, including uninsured motorist (UM) claims, PIP, MedPay and Medicare or health plan liens. Ask how the firm gathers evidence such as crash reports, dashcam video and event data recorder (EDR) downloads. Ask whether the lawyer has tried car crash cases before a jury, because trial experience can shape how a case is prepared, even though most claims settle.

Read the fee agreement closely

Many injury lawyers work on a contingency fee, a percentage of any recovery. ABA Model Rule 1.5(c), which many states have adopted in some form, requires a contingent fee agreement to be in writing and signed by the client, and to explain how the fee is calculated and whether expenses come out before or after it. 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.

Communication and staffing

Ask whether the car accident lawyer you meet will be the one handling the case, and how often to expect updates. Ask who answers questions when the lawyer is in court, and how updates are usually sent. If the firm plans to refer the case or bring in co-counsel, ABA Model Rule 1.5(e) generally requires the client's agreement, confirmed in writing, before lawyers in different firms divide a caraccidentlawyers.wiki fee.

Documents worth bringing

A first meeting goes further when the paperwork is on the table. Bring the police report, or at least the report number, together with photos of the vehicles and the scene. Insurance letters, claim numbers and any forms already signed matter as well, since they show who has made contact and what has been agreed. Medical bills and pay stubs help show the losses so far.

What no lawyer can promise

Be wary of anyone who promises a specific dollar amount at a first meeting. No lawyer can know the outcome of a claim in advance. Unsolicited calls or visits 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 article is general information and not legal advice.