How to Choose a Car Accident Attorney

Hiring an auto accident lawyer is easier with a short list of 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.

Confirm the license and record

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 publish public discipline records. A listing in a directory or a badge from a rating publisher reflects that publisher's selection, 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.

Ask about relevant experience

Ask how many car crash claims the lawyer handles, and of what kind. An auto accident lawyer should be comfortable with coverage questions, such as uninsured motorist (UM) claims, PIP and MedPay, and liens from health plans or Medicare. 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 resolve without a trial.

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 follow in some form, 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, such as filing fees, medical record charges and deposition costs. Ask whether the percentage rises if a lawsuit is filed, and ask for a written closing statement at the end.

Communication and staffing

Ask whether the car crash attorney at the consultation will handle the case personally, and how often updates will come. Ask who will answer questions when the lawyer is unavailable, 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 consultation is more useful when the documents are available. Bring the crash report, or the report number if the report is not ready yet, together with photos of the vehicles and the scene. Letters from insurers and any forms already signed are worth bringing too, since they show who has made contact and what has been agreed. Medical bills and proof of missed work help document the losses so far.

What no lawyer can promise

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 ***Click here!*** live person-to-person solicitation by lawyers. A car accident lawyer can explain which statute of limitations applies. This is general information, not legal advice.