



Seeking Immigration Assistance

As an unaccompanied child or the sponsor responsible for their care, it's crucial to understand your rights and the importance of securing legal representation. An immigration attorney or DOJ accredited legal representative can assist in ensuring the child's compliance with their immigration proceedings and applying for legal relief to help the child remain in the U.S. long-term.



How can I find legal immigration assistance?

You can use trusted online directories such as:

- [National Immigration Legal Services Directory \(Immigration Advocates Network\)](#)
- [EOIR List of Pro Bono Legal Services Providers](#)
- [USCRI Humanitarian Legal Services Division](#)
- [USCRI's Community Resource Directory](#)
- [Informed Immigrant](#)
- [ImportaMí](#)

You can also find legal help through a recommendation from a friend or family member; however, be sure to ask questions about the legal representative's credentials to protect yourself from fraud.

How much do immigration legal services cost? Are free or low-cost services available?

The cost of immigration legal services can vary significantly, ranging from \$0 (pro bono) to over \$10,000 per case.

Nonprofit organizations often provide pro bono and low-cost services. Pro bono services are provided free of charge, while low-cost services are offered at reduced rates.

Private attorneys may also offer discounted rates based on a sliding scale, which means the cost varies according to the client's income, making services more affordable for those with lower incomes.

It is crucial to research and contact multiple providers to understand the fees involved. Eligibility for low-cost services may depend on your family size and income. In some areas, finding pro bono or low-cost attorneys can be challenging, so be sure to inquire about discounted services or payment plan options as well.



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What is the difference between a notary, an attorney, and a DOJ accredited representative?

In the United States, a “notary public” is someone who can function as a witness to document signings and administer oaths, but cannot give legal advice, especially on immigration matters.

An attorney must be licensed to practice law, having completed law school and passed the bar exam, and can represent clients in all legal matters, including immigration court.

A DOJ accredited representative, on the other hand, is a non-attorney authorized by the Department of Justice (DOJ) to provide immigration legal services under the supervision of a recognized organization. They can give legal advice and represent clients before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the immigration court, but their scope is limited to immigration matters.

It is important to take steps to protect yourself from fraud by unqualified individuals who pretend to be immigration attorneys or legal representatives: for example, individuals on social media (Facebook, TikTok, Instagram) offering legal advice without proper credentials. Be aware that following their advice can lead to serious consequences. Always verify the qualifications of anyone giving immigration guidance and seek help from a licensed attorney or accredited representative.

For more information on notary fraud, please [click here](#).



Questions to ask before scheduling a consultation with an attorney or legal representative

- Do you have experience working with unaccompanied children (UCs) who have arrived in the U.S. without their parent/legal guardian and were released from the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) custody to an approved sponsor in the U.S.?
- Do you have experience working on cases of children living with a sponsor who is not the legal guardian of the UC? (For more information on legal guardianship, [click here](#).)
- Can you help a sponsor obtain legal guardianship/custody, or would you refer the case to a family law attorney?
- Do you have experience with distinct types of legal relief for immigrant children such as Asylum or Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS)? (For more information on SIJS, [click here](#).)
- What is the cost for your services? Is there a one-time flat fee or is a payment plan available? Do you charge a fixed amount or by the hour?

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How can I prepare for a consultation with an attorney or legal representative?

To support your case, bring important documents that support your presence in the United States. For unaccompanied children, this includes their:

NTA (Notice to Appear)

Discharge packet provided by the ORR shelter

Birth certificate

Documents that the child's parents have signed, such as a letter of designation of care or Power of Attorney

Any other documents received from the court or DHS (Department of Homeland Security).



Other helpful documents to bring:

- Sponsor/caregiver's proof of income to determine whether they qualify for a payment plan
- Medical records, school records, benefits receipts, remittance receipts, other court records, etc.

Be prepared to share with the attorney or legal representative any details of past abuse, neglect, trauma, or victimization, or explain why you are afraid to return to your home country. Although this information may be difficult to share, it is important that the attorney is aware of your full history to determine what form(s) of legal relief you might qualify for.



What questions should I ask the attorney during the first consultation?

- What type(s) of legal immigration relief can I qualify for? (For more information on different forms of legal relief, [click here](#).)
- Who will oversee my case?
- What timeline should I expect?
- What are my chances of success?

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What can I do to protect myself from immigration scams?

- Hire only a licensed attorney or a DOJ accredited representative who is fully authorized to appear in court.

To check if the attorney is licensed to practice law through the American Bar Association, [click here](#).

To check the credentials of a DOJ accredited representative, [click here](#).

- Require that the attorney or legal representative provide you with a written contract of representation which clearly explains their services and payment terms. Take time to read and understand the terms of the contract. You should not feel rushed into accepting or signing the contract.
- Request a receipt for every payment and copies of all documents submitted on your behalf by the attorney or legal representative.
- Never sign blank, incomplete, or unclear documents.
- Do not sign documents with false or incorrect information.



Other tips

- Review the attorney or legal representative's website for information on their experience and background in immigration law.
- Check if the attorney or legal representative has been disciplined (suspended or disbarred) through the [U.S. Department of Justice](#).
- Visit [Avvo](#) and read the reviews and ratings from the attorney's clients.



Remember:

It is important to thoroughly vet an attorney or legal representative by asking the questions and following the steps outlined above before signing a contract.

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