



## Hiring an Immigration Attorney

Finding a good immigration attorney is important. Depending on your situation, you may spend considerable time and money working with your attorney. As with any important decision, research your options thoroughly and take the time to make an educated choice.

Immigration law is complex and changes frequently. Attorneys, also called “lawyers,” complete a professional degree and receive a license by states to practice law. Most attorneys select an area of specialization such as immigration, patents, trusts and estates, or litigation. An attorney practicing immigration law should have a thorough understanding of laws and procedures that pertain to non-US citizens. A good immigration lawyer will be able to explain the legal options that are available to you, answer your questions competently, and will be able to correctly prepare and file immigration petitions or represent you before federal immigration agencies such as U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS).

### Protect Yourself Against Fraud When Seeking Out Legal Advice

Before consulting with or hiring an immigration attorney, it is important to confirm that he or she has a license to practice law in the United States, and that the license is valid and current. Those who claim to be able to help you with immigration matters, but do not have a law license may be breaking the law or lack the proper training. Fraudulent or incomplete legal advice could harm your chance of succeeding in an immigration benefit application, cause delays or make your position much more difficult or impossible to defend in immigration court.

### When Should You Hire an Immigration Attorney?

Hiring a competent immigration attorney can help you avoid unnecessary processing delays and many hours of work interpreting immigration procedures and preparing paperwork and petitions. You should consult an immigration attorney if you have a complicated situation that is beyond the scope of expertise and/or responsibility of International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS) at CU Boulder.

There are also situations where a person can successfully file a petition with USCIS without the help of an immigration attorney. Family-based permanent residency applications (i.e. based on marriage to a U.S. citizen) may be one example, depending on the complexity of the case. If you decide to file a petition on your own, you may want to pay for an initial consultation with a qualified lawyer to get you started. To file successfully, you must learn in detail about the procedures and requirements of your particular petition type and be prepared to begin early to allow ample time for each step of the process. Begin by visiting the [United States Citizenship and Immigration Services website](#) for forms and general information. We do not recommend calling the USCIS Contact Center for advice as the representatives are not trained to provide guidance on immigration options.

### Special Issues for Employees of the University of Colorado Boulder

International Student and Scholar Services at CU Boulder is the only office authorized by the Chancellor to handle, oversee, and sign all immigration applications for the University of Colorado Boulder. ISSS handles all matters related to F and J visas. We prepare and file all

employment-based U.S. immigration applications for CU Boulder’s faculty, staff, and students including for permanent residency (“green card”) status.

Students, faculty, or staff members may want to consult with an outside immigration attorney about their options or may need the services of an outside immigration attorney to handle personal immigration matters. Even in cases where the university handles the initial stages of employment-based permanent residency sponsorship on behalf of an international employee, the University does not prepare applications for adjustment of status to permanent residence (Form I-485) or for immigrant visas at U.S. consulates abroad after the University’s applications are approved.

We strongly recommend that those inquiring about general or personal matters consult a reliable source of information. ISSS staff members do not have the experience or expertise to advise you on all legal matters that may arise during your stay in the U.S.

## Useful Websites

We recommend the websites below to students or scholars who want to research immigration topics because they contain accurate information about U.S. immigration laws and procedures. Please understand that applying the general information available on these sites to your own immigration situation may be difficult and even dangerous.

- [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services](#)
- [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Student and Exchange Visitor Program for information about F and J visas](#)
- [U.S. Department of State Visa Office](#)
- [U.S. Department of Labor](#)

## Finding a Local Immigration Attorney

The website of the [American Immigration Lawyers Association](#) includes an **Immigration Lawyer Search** tool that you can use to find a local immigration attorney who is a member of that organization.

## Organizations that Advocate for Immigrants & Immigration

- [American Civil Liberties Union](#)
- [American Immigration Council](#)
- [Center for Human Rights & Constitutional Law](#)
- [International Trial Attorneys Association](#)
- [National Immigration Law Center](#)
- [National Immigration Law Project of the National Lawyers Guild](#)
- [The Denver Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs](#)

## Low Cost/No Cost Legal Assistance for Individuals with Limited Financial Means

- [Metro Volunteer Lawyers](#)  
Provides free and low-cost civil legal services to those in need in the Denver Metro area.
- [Center for Trauma & Resilience](#)  
Provides legal assistance to immigrant spouses, children and parents who have suffered abuse from a U.S. Citizen or Legal Permanent Resident.
- [City of Littleton Immigrant Resource Center](#)  
Provides English as a Second Language services as well as assisting Legal Permanent Residents to become U.S. Citizens.
- [Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition– Denver](#)  
Provides application support in naturalization/ citizenship.

## Questions to Ask Before You Hire an Immigration Attorney

- 1) ***How long have you been practicing immigration law? How much of your work is immigration related? How much experience do you have in \_\_\_\_\_ (your particular issue)?*** We recommend that you look for an attorney who does all or most of their work in immigration law.
- 2) ***Will you provide an initial consultation before I hire you to take my case?*** If so, be sure to find out **how much** the consultation will cost and how long will it be.
- 3) ***What is the best way for me to contact you?*** Is the attorney accessible via cell phone, pager, email, and/or office phone?
- 4) ***Who will be handling the details of my case?*** Will you contact the attorney or a paralegal with questions? What is the training and experience of the paralegal?
- 5) ***How much will it cost to hire you to handle my case?*** Rates vary significantly based on geographic location, the specifics of your situation, and other factors. Be sure to ask **before** the work begins what the legal fees and other costs will be. Be sure that you understand exactly what services the fees will include.
- 6) ***Will you charge me a flat rate, or an hourly rate? If it is a flat rate, what services does the flat rate include?*** If the attorney charges an **hourly rate**, ask how they handle phone calls and emails. If the attorney charges a **flat rate** and if an initial petition requires additional evidence, or is denied, will the response or an appeal be included in the flat rate?
- 7) ***Will I have to pay before the work starts (“up front”) or when the work is completed?*** Some attorneys will ask for a ***“retainer”*** (a partial fee paid in advance for his/her professional services). Many attorneys who charge a flat fee will require all or part of the fees and costs before starting the work. However, the attorney still must be able to account for how the money is spent.