

You can minimize problems and misunderstandings with an attorney by taking a few simple steps:



Make sure your attorney is licensed to practice law in California. Ask for their State Bar number and go to www.calbar.ca.gov to confirm the attorney's status. Discuss with the attorney what they will do for you and what it will cost. If the attorney will work for you on a contingency fee basis, a contract is required by law. For any type of engagement, if your costs will be more than \$1,000, a written contract is required by law.



You can request detailed billing or accounting on a monthly basis.



Be honest with your attorney and provide complete information about your case, including any documents that may be relevant. Keep copies for your records.



Ask the attorney for an estimate of how much time your case might require. However, be aware that delays may occur as a result of circumstances that your attorney cannot control.



Keep copies of any correspondence as well as detailed notes about any calls you make to your attorney's office.



Ask your attorney to keep you updated on your case. You can ask the attorney to send you copies of letters and any official documents filed in court.

CONTACT THE STATE BAR OF CALIFORNIA

Rules of Professional Conduct and State Bar Act for California Attorneys

www.calbar.ca.gov/rules

Fee Disputes

www.calbar.ca.gov/fee-disputes
415-538-2020

Complaints: Attorney Misconduct or Unauthorized Practice of Law

www.calbar.ca.gov/Filecomplaint
800-843-9053 (Outside California: 213-765-1200)

Client Security Fund

Reimburses clients who have lost money or property due to attorney misconduct. Restrictions apply.
213-765-1140
Email: clientsecurityfund@calbar.ca.gov

Offices

Main Office:

The State Bar of California
180 Howard Street
San Francisco, CA 94105
415-538-2000

Los Angeles Office:

The State Bar of California
845 South Figueroa Street
Los Angeles, CA 90017
213-765-1000

Follow the State Bar:



www.calbar.ca.gov
866-44-CA-LAW



Looking for information about legal services in your native language?
Call the State Bar at 866-44-CA-LAW.

This pamphlet is also available in:

Spanish Español • Vietnamese Tiếng Việt
Korean 한국어 • Chinese 中文
• Russian Русский • Tagalog

Information in this pamphlet is valid as of February 2020.

If You Have a Problem with an Attorney



The State Bar
of California

WHAT YOU SHOULD EXPECT FROM YOUR ATTORNEY

If you hire an attorney in California, you should expect them to advise and represent you professionally. You should specifically expect your attorney to:



Act ethically and abide by the Rules of Professional Conduct and the California Business and Professions Code. (See back panel for more information.)



Exercise independent professional judgment on your behalf.



Represent you zealously and consider all lawful and ethical means to present or defend your case.



Maintain confidentiality with rare exceptions. Allow you to make final decisions about how your case will be handled.



Keep you updated on the progress of your case.

For most people, working with an attorney is a smooth process. However, if problems occur, the State Bar has created this pamphlet to help you. It provides reliable information about how you can address and resolve problems with your attorney.

Minimize Problems with Your Attorney



If a Problem Occurs, Act Fast

- Contact your attorney by phone right away at the first sign of a problem or concern. Follow up with a letter or email if needed.
- Ask to meet with your attorney in person if your problem or concern is not resolved.
- If your attorney does not respond to your requests to resolve your problem, consider taking additional action, as outlined below.



If You Think Your Attorney Is Acting Unethically

Here are some examples of attorney conduct that would be in violation of ethical rules of conduct:

- You hired an attorney a year ago, and he or she does not respond to your letters or calls.
- You were told by an insurance company that a settlement check was sent to your attorney two months ago, but your attorney has not contacted you about this check.
- Your attorney has settled your case without your permission.
- Your attorney missed a deadline for filing your lawsuit.

If you suspect your attorney of misconduct of any kind, you should file a complaint with the State Bar.

You can file a complaint online, write a letter, or call our complaint hotline so that we can send a complaint form to you. See back panel for contact information.



If You Disagree with Your Attorney's Advice

- Talk with your attorney to ensure that you understand their advice and strategy.
- If you are not satisfied, you may want to get a second opinion from another attorney.
- If you remain dissatisfied, you might want to seek another attorney.
- You may terminate your relationship with an attorney at any time.



If Your Attorney's Bill Seems Too High

- Talk with your attorney to ensure that you understand what your attorney is billing you for and that there are no billing errors. Ask for an accounting.
- If this does not solve the problem, you can request a fee arbitration, which is a formal review by a lawyer arbitrator or an arbitration panel.
- To request arbitration, you can contact the local bar association where the legal services were provided or go to the State Bar's web page on fee disputes. (See back panel for contact information.)