

Filing a Complaint against an Attorney

If you feel your attorney has engaged in misconduct, please file a complaint with the State Bar. Filing a complaint helps the State Bar stop attorney misconduct and may prevent others from becoming victims of it. You do not have to be a U.S. citizen, and there is no charge to file a complaint.



FILING

You can file your complaint online or by regular mail. Forms and instructions are available on our website.



REVIEW

*Time required:
At least three weeks;
up to 60 days.*

A State Bar attorney will review your complaint to determine if it warrants investigation. The State Bar may contact you for additional information.

In limited situations, if your complaint indicates misconduct, the State Bar may direct the attorney to take certain action to resolve the matter without investigation.

NO

If your complaint **DOES NOT** indicate misconduct, the State Bar will close your complaint and send you a letter explaining why the complaint was closed.

You may request a review of this decision by writing to the Complaint Review Unit, which may reopen your complaint if it determines that it was closed inappropriately or that you have new information to support your complaint. The letter notifying you that the complaint was closed will contain instructions for requesting a review. You must submit your request within 90 days of the closing letter's date.

YES



INVESTIGATION

If your complaint **DOES** indicate misconduct, the State Bar will investigate the allegations. You will be notified about the attorney and investigator assigned to your complaint.

NO

If the investigation **DOES NOT** confirm misconduct, the State Bar will close your complaint and send you a letter explaining why it was closed.

Even if your complaint **DOES NOT** indicate misconduct, the State Bar may write to the attorney to suggest resources to address the conduct that led to a complaint.

YES

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Questions? Call our multilingual intake line at 800-843-9053



The State Bar of California

If the Investigation Confirms Misconduct:



NOTICE & SETTLEMENT PROPOSAL

If the investigation **CONFIRMS misconduct**, the State Bar will either resolve the case with an alternative to discipline or send a notice to the attorney of its intent to file charges in an attempt to settle the case.

YES

If the case is **SETTLED**, the State Bar Court will review the settlement agreement, which describes the discipline to be imposed. If the discipline includes suspension or disbarment, the agreement must be reviewed and approved by the California Supreme Court. If not, the State Bar Court can order the discipline.

NO



TRIAL & DISCIPLINE

If the case is **NOT SETTLED**, the State Bar will file charges against the attorney in the State Bar Court and make the case public.⁽¹⁾

The State Bar Court will schedule proceedings.

NO

After trial, if the State Bar Court judge determines that the attorney **SHOULD NOT be disciplined**, the State Bar Court will close the case with no discipline imposed.

YES

If the State Bar Court judge determines that the attorney **SHOULD BE suspended or disbarred**, the decision must be reviewed and approved by the California Supreme Court. The State Bar Court can order less severe forms of discipline.⁽¹⁾

Either the attorney or the State Bar can request a review of the State Bar Court decision.

⁽¹⁾ All public discipline information is noted on the attorney's online profile and summarized on the State Bar website Discipline section. Documents are posted in the State Bar Court online case dockets.

PLEASE NOTE

If criminal conduct is suspected, the State Bar may refer complaints to a law enforcement agency for investigation and potential prosecution.

If you have lost money due to a licensed attorney's dishonest conduct, you should apply for reimbursement from the State Bar's Client Security Fund.

If you have questions about the complaint process, or want to know the status of a complaint you have filed, call the State Bar at 800-843-9053.



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[More information on attorney misconduct](#)