Questions to Ask Before Hiring an Auto Accident Lawyer

Choosing a car accident lawyer is easier with a short list of questions. Some crashes involve one insurer and a modest property claim, while others bring serious injuries, several policies and disputed fault. The questions below can make a first consultation more useful, regardless of the size of the claim.

Start with the license

Before the first meeting, check the basics. Each state bar or licensing agency provides a way to confirm that a lawyer is licensed and in good standing, and many also publish disciplinary history. A directory listing or a rating badge reflects the publisher's own selection process, not a license check and not a prediction of results. If the crash happened in another state, ask whether the lawyer is licensed there or will work with local counsel.

Experience with car crash claims

Ask how many car crash claims the lawyer handles and what kinds. An auto accident lawyer should be comfortable with coverage questions, including uninsured motorist (UM) claims, PIP, MedPay and Medicare or health plan liens. 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 settle.

Fees and the written agreement

Many injury lawyers work 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 explain how the fee is calculated and whether expenses come out before or after it. Ask who covers case costs if there is no recovery, such as filing fees, medical record charges and deposition costs. Ask whether the percentage changes 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 to expect updates. Ask who answers questions when the lawyer is in court, and whether updates come by phone, email or a client portal. If the firm plans to refer the case or bring in co-counsel, ABA Model Rule 1.5(e) generally requires the client's agreement, confirmed in writing, before lawyers in different firms divide a fee.

Preparing for the consultation

A first meeting goes further when the paperwork is on the table. 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, because they show what has already been said and signed. Medical bills and pay stubs help show 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 car crash lawyer 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 live person-to-person solicitation by lawyers. An automobile accident lawyer should be able to explain the statute of limitations that applies. This article is general information and not legal advice.