Questions to Ask Before Hiring an Auto Accident Lawyer

Picking a car accident attorney is easier with a caraccidentlawyers.wiki short list of questions. Some crashes involve a single insurer and a modest property claim, while others bring serious injuries, several policies and disputed fault. These questions can make a first meeting more productive, regardless of the size of the claim.

Start with the license

Before any meeting, confirm the basics. Every state bar or licensing agency offers a way to check that a lawyer is licensed and in good standing, and many publish public discipline records. A listing in a directory or a badge from a rating publisher reflects that publisher's selection, rather than a license check or 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 of what kind. 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 resolve without a trial.

Read the fee agreement closely

Injury lawyers often handle these claims on a contingency fee, meaning a percentage of any recovery. ABA Model Rule 1.5(c), which many states have adopted 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 pays 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.

Who will handle the case

Ask whether the car accident lawyer you meet will be the one handling the case, and how often to expect updates. Ask who will answer questions when the lawyer is unavailable, 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.

What to bring to the first meeting

A consultation is more useful when the documents are available. Bring the police report, or at least the report number, along with photos of the scene and the vehicles. Insurance letters, claim numbers and any forms already signed matter as well, because they show what has already been said and signed. Medical bills and proof of missed work help document the losses so far.

Warning signs

Be wary of anyone who promises a specific dollar amount at a first meeting. No lawyer can know the outcome of a claim in advance. Unsolicited calls or visits after a crash are another warning sign, because ABA Model Rule 7.3 generally restricts lawyers from soliciting clients through live person-to-person contact. An automobile accident lawyer should be able to explain the statute of limitations that applies. This is general information, not legal advice.