



HOW TO CHOOSE AN ATTORNEY

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The information displayed in this handout is meant for the sole use of Active duty service members, retirees, their families and other personnel eligible for legal assistance from the Goodfellow AFB Legal Office. The information is general in nature and presented to assist those eligible persons prepare for a legal assistance appointment with a professional in the legal office. Rights and responsibilities vary widely according to the particular set of circumstances in each case. Laws can vary across states, services, and civilian jurisdictions and laws are changed from time to time. Do not rely upon the general restatements of background information presented here without discussing your specific situation with a legal professional.

HOW TO CHOOSE AN ATTORNEY

Finding an Attorney

The Base Legal Office is unable to make specific recommendations or represent you in court. However, here are several effective methods to find a reliable attorney:

- **Personal Recommendations:** Ask friends, neighbors, or co-workers who have recently consulted an attorney. Personal experiences can provide valuable insights into which attorneys to consider and which to avoid.
- **State Bar Referral Services:** Most state bar associations offer referral services to help you find an attorney. These services can connect you with lawyers who specialize in your type of case and are in good standing with the bar.

Texas: Contact the Texas Bar Referral Service at (800) 252-9690 or (877) 9TEXBAR (toll-free). Visit www.texasbar.com for more information.

- **Online Directories and Reviews:** Websites like Avvo, Martindale-Hubbell, and LegalMatch offer directories and reviews of attorneys. These platforms provide ratings, client reviews, and detailed profiles that can help you make an informed decision.
- **Local Listings:** While more traditional, local directories can still be useful. Given San Angelo's size, it won't take long to contact each attorney listed.

Initial Consultation

When you contact an attorney, follow these steps:

- **Briefly Describe Your Issue:** Whether it's a landlord dispute, a divorce, or an injury, provide a concise overview. Remember, the initial consultation should be free, but don't expect free legal advice during this meeting.
- **Experience and References:** Inquire about the attorney's experience and success in handling similar cases. Ask for references from previous clients who have agreed to be contacted.
- **Cost Estimate:** Ask for an estimate of the total cost and the expected duration of the legal process. Note that complex cases may not have a precise estimate.
- **Be Prepared to Hire:** If you feel confident, you might decide to hire the attorney on the spot. See the section "Working With Your Attorney" below for more details.

Understanding Legal Fees

Attorneys typically charge in one of three ways: hourly fees, flat fees, or contingent fees. Here's what you need to know:

- **Hourly Fees:** Attorneys may charge by the quarter-hour or tenth-hour. For example, a five-minute phone call could cost \$20.00 if billed by the quarter-hour or \$8.00 if billed by the tenth-hour. Ask about their billing increments.

- **Flat Fees:** Common for routine tasks, such as simple, uncontested divorces, which average around \$500 plus court costs. Be aware that fees may increase if the case becomes complex.
- **Contingent Fees:** Typically used in personal injury cases, you pay a percentage of the award if you win. This percentage usually ranges from 15% to 33%. Ensure you understand whether the fee is calculated before or after expenses are deducted.

Fee Agreements

A fee agreement is essential to maintain a clear understanding between you and your attorney. Ask for a fee agreement during your first meeting and review it thoroughly. Clarify any points you don't understand.

Legal Aid Options

If you can't afford an attorney, there are resources available:

Legal Aid of NorthWest Texas: Provides assistance with landlord-tenant disputes, emergency divorces, public assistance programs, and more. Contact them at 17 S. Chadbourne, Suite 403, San Angelo, TX 76903, phone: 653-6982 or (800) 284-5180.

Legal Hotline for Texans: Offers help with emergency domestic relations, debt defense, guardianship, and other matters for seniors, Medicaid-eligible persons, and indigent crime victims. Contact them at (800) 622-2520 or visit www.tlsc.org.

*For additional resources please contact our office.

Working With Your Attorney

To ensure a smooth process and keep costs down, follow these tips:

- **Prepare a Summary:** Write a detailed summary of the facts related to your case.
- **Be Punctual:** Arrive on time for appointments and call ahead if you need to reschedule.
- **Bring Relevant Documents:** Have all necessary paperwork ready for your meetings.
- **Be Honest:** Full transparency with your attorney is crucial. They need all the information to represent you effectively.
- **Communicate Clearly:** Keep your attorney updated with any new information or changes in your contact details.
- **Limit Contact:** Avoid unnecessary daily calls to your attorney to keep costs down.
- **Follow Advice:** Adhere to your attorney's guidance and discuss any concerns promptly.

Reference: <https://texaslawhelp.org/>

NOTE: This guide is intended for general informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. It is advisable to periodically verify this information and consult with a legal professional for the most current and applicable advice. If you have any questions or need to schedule an appointment with a legal assistance attorney, please call the Legal Office at 325-654-3203.