



Community Advisory:¹ Know Your Rights After Ending Representation with an Attorney or Legal Representative

If you end your relationship with a licensed or formerly licensed attorney or Department of Justice Accredited Representative related to immigration legal services, there are important steps you can take to protect yourself and your immigration case.

Ask for Your Complete File

You can always request a copy of your case file during the course of a representation. In addition, at the conclusion of a representation, the client file generated in the course of the representation must be turned over to the client at the client's request. This may include: applications and forms filed on your behalf; copies of supporting documents and evidence; the documents you gave the lawyer, including all original documents; notices from immigration court or United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and other agencies; receipts and filing confirmations; correspondence related to your case; and records of payments made. Consider requesting your file in writing, and keep a copy of your request for your records. An attorney may impose additional fees for extra file copies, but should provide the initial copy at no cost.

Keep Important Documents and Proof of Payment

Save and organize all documents related to your case, including: retainer agreements or contracts; payment receipts, invoices, or bank records; emails, text messages, and letters; copies of forms and applications; and immigration notices and deadlines. These documents may help a new legal service provider understand your case and determine next steps.

Track Your Case Status

If you have a pending application or petition with USCIS, check your case status online: <https://egov.uscis.gov/> using your 13-character receipt number (found on your USCIS receipt notice). Enter the receipt number on the USCIS Case Status website to view the most recent updates on your case, including any decision, request for evidence, or next steps. You can also create a USCIS online account to receive case updates and manage your case electronically.

If you have a case before the Immigration Court or the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), you can check your case status through EOIR's Automated Case Information System - <https://acis.eoir.justice.gov>. You will need your A-Number and country of nationality. The system provides information about upcoming hearings, case decisions, and other case updates. You may also call EOIR's automated case information line at 1-800-898-7180. Court notices and official documents remain the official source of information about your case.

Seek a Second Opinion or New Legal Consultation Quickly

If you no longer have legal representation and believe you received incorrect advice, poor communication, missed deadlines, or services that harmed your case, seek advice from a reputable immigration attorney or

¹ This advisory is for general informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. As every situation is unique, we recommend consulting with a licensed attorney or Department of Justice Accredited Representative before making any legal decisions based on the information presented in this advisory.

nonprofit legal service provider as soon as possible. A new representative may be able to: assist you with requesting your complete immigration file under the Freedom of Information/Privacy Act; review what was previously filed; identify errors or missed deadlines; explain your current legal options; help protect you from future immigration consequences. Immigration deadlines can be very strict, so it is important not to wait.

Be Careful of Immigration Fraud and Misrepresentation

Not everyone offering immigration help is authorized to practice law or provide legal advice. See RPC 5.5, which governs the unauthorized practice of law and multi-jurisdictional practice. Be especially wary of anyone who guarantees results, encourages false information in applications, refuses to provide copies of filings, asks you to sign blank forms, or will not give written contracts or receipts for payments made. Always ask whether the person is a licensed attorney or a Department of Justice Accredited Representative. Since immigration law is federal in nature, note that attorneys practicing immigration law can be licensed in any U.S. state. You can ask an attorney which state they are licensed in, in order to verify they are licensed to practice and in good standing. Attorneys licensed in Washington state are found in the Washington State Bar Association's Legal Directory: <https://www.mywsba.org/personifyebusiness/LegalDirectory.aspx>.

You Can Report Misconduct

Depending on the situation, you may be able to file a complaint or report concerns to government or regulatory agencies.

In Washington state, possible reporting options may include:

- The Washington State Attorney General's Office for possible consumer protection concerns involving unfair or deceptive business practices. Visit <https://www.atg.wa.gov/file-complaint> for more information.
- The Washington State Bar Association for attorney misconduct or ethical violations involving licensed attorneys. Visit <https://www.wsba.org/for-the-public/concerns-about-a-lawyer> for more information.
- The Executive Office for Immigration Review for complaints involving immigration practitioners. Visit <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/submit-complaint> for more information. Note that this is only for reporting individuals practicing before the Immigration Court or BIA.

Protect Yourself Going Forward

When hiring a new legal representative:

- Ask questions about their credentials and experience with your specific type of immigration case
- Request a written agreement explaining services and breakdown of fees
- Make sure you receive copies of everything filed in your case
- Track important court dates and deadlines yourself when possible
- Do not sign blank documents or documents that you do not understand
- Keep your original documents

Getting reliable legal advice early can make a significant difference in your immigration case.