

The 7 Questions to Ask a Potential Auto Accident Lawyer

Let's say that you have been injured in a motor vehicle accident in Illinois which you believe to be someone else's fault. In order to make sure that your interests are properly represented, you decide to hire an auto accident lawyer to handle your case. But there are approximately 60,000 lawyers who are employed throughout the state. How do you know which one of them is right for you?

When researching a potential auto accident attorney, here are some questions you should ask.

1. Does the attorney specialize in auto accident cases?

Attorneys are like doctors - even though they all have advanced degrees, they generally focus their practices on specific areas. You want a lawyer that specializes in auto accident cases as opposed to areas like wills, tax law, medical malpractice, sexual discrimination, or other disciplines.

2. How many years of experience does the attorney have in handling auto accident cases?

Some ads tout a given attorney's "years of experience practicing law." But you need to find out how many of those years were spent arguing auto accident cases. After all, a lawyer's 20 years of legal experience won't help you much if 19 of them were spent handling divorces.

3. How much auto accident trial experience does the attorney have?

Though most lawsuits never make it to trial, you need to be sure your lawyer is ready to head into the courtroom if needed. Think about it: even though the IRS probably won't flag your tax return, would you hire a tax accountant if he or she wasn't prepared to defend you in an audit?

4. How much experience does the attorney have practicing in the county or city where the accident took place?

Though the laws are mostly the same throughout Illinois, each individual jurisdiction has its own unique attributes and biases. For instance, if your case will be filed in Cook County, you may think twice before you hire an attorney who practices mostly in Macon County.

5. How does the attorney fulfill his or her continuing legal education obligations?

Every Illinois attorney has to complete at least 20 hours of continuing legal education every two years. If an attorney is focusing on expediency instead of relevancy when choosing education topics (much like taking an "easy A" course in college instead of something in your major field of study), then he or she may not be up to date on the latest changes in auto accident law.

6. Which professional organizations does the attorney belong to?

The American Association for Justice and the Illinois Trial Lawyers Association both promote the rights of injured individuals and their families. So it says something about an attorney who belongs to one or both of these professional groups.

7. Does the attorney bill by the hour in auto accident cases?

Some lawyers charge you "by the hour" when they work on your case, meaning that you can run up a hefty bill even before your case gets through the discovery phase. Other attorneys work on a "contingency" basis, which means they take a portion of the eventual settlement or judgment as their fee - meaning that if you don't get any money, they don't get a penny. Which fee structure would you prefer *your* lawyer to have?

Selecting the ideal auto accident attorney for your case is an important decision. The experience, knowledge, and skill level could mean the difference between a large damage or settlement award and a small one (or none at all). So be sure to choose wisely.