

Finding help with immigration law:

# Do you know who your allies are?

Trying to understand immigration law by yourself can be overwhelming. Figuring out who to trust is just as hard. Beware of *notarios* and other immigration scammers trying to cheat you out of your money and waste your time.

In the United States, only attorneys and Department of Justice accredited representatives can provide legal advice and services about immigration. Use this guide to understand the types of organizations and individuals who are allowed to help you and to learn exactly what they can do.

Need to understand why *notarios* should be avoided in the United States? Find more information at [cliniclegal.org/notario](https://cliniclegal.org/notario).



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## What is an attorney?

An attorney, also known as a lawyer, earned a degree from a law graduate school. He/she passed an exam to join a state's bar association.

## Where can attorneys help you?

Attorneys can represent you in front of the Department of Homeland Security, United States Citizenship and Immigration Service, any immigration court, the Board of Immigration Appeals and in the state court where he/she is a member of the bar association. Because some immigration cases require following special state laws, it is a good idea to ask your representative if they need to be licensed in your state to handle your case.

## Where can you find an immigration attorney?

The American Immigration Lawyers Association can help you find an immigration attorney. Visit their website at [www.aialawyer.org](http://www.aialawyer.org). Many immigration attorneys also work at a CLINIC affiliate. Search the directory on our website at [cliniclegal.org/affiliates/directory](http://cliniclegal.org/affiliates/directory).

## What is a DOJ recognized organization or accredited individual?

A Department of Justice recognized organization is a non-profit agency that provides low-cost immigration services. The DOJ recognizes organizations and accredits their staff members and volunteers individually because they have gained a certain level of experience and training working with immigration law.

## Where can a DOJ accredited representative help you?

First, you need to find out what type of accreditation he/she has to make sure they are allowed to help with your specific case. If the representative is fully accredited, he/she can represent you in front of the Department of Homeland Security, United States Citizenship and Immigration Service, any immigration court and the DOJ. A partially accredited representative can only represent you before the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service. No type of DOJ accredited representative can represent you in front of a state court.

## Where can you find a DOJ recognized organization or DOJ accredited individual?

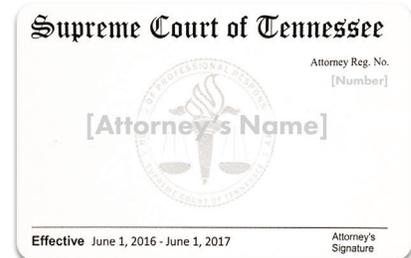
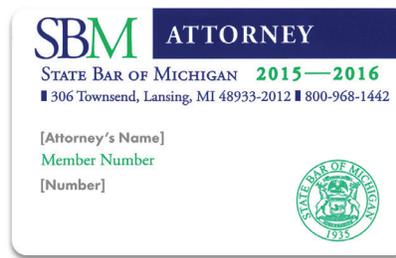
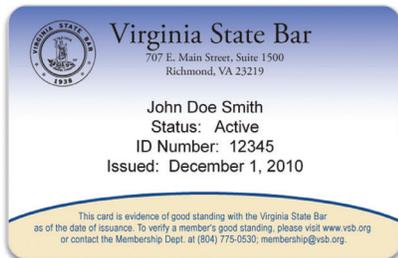
CLINIC works with hundreds of organizations and individuals who want to help. Search the directory on our website at [cliniclegal.org/affiliates/directory](http://cliniclegal.org/affiliates/directory). The U. S. Department of Justice also provides a list of approved representatives at [justice.gov/eoir/recognition-accreditation-roster-reports](http://justice.gov/eoir/recognition-accreditation-roster-reports).

### Does something seem wrong?

If anyone offering help does not allow you to see their professional papers or if you cannot verify their ability to help you legally, they are not allies. Do not give them any money or information about your case. Many people may offer their help—some would like to cheat you, others will offer out of kindness. Either reason could put your future immigration status at risk. Visit [justice.gov/eoir/list-of-currently-disciplined-practitioners](http://justice.gov/eoir/list-of-currently-disciplined-practitioners) for a list of people who are no longer allowed to help with immigration cases. Remember, just because someone offers to help does not mean they can. Seek legal help only from qualified professionals.

## How can you check to make sure someone is an attorney?

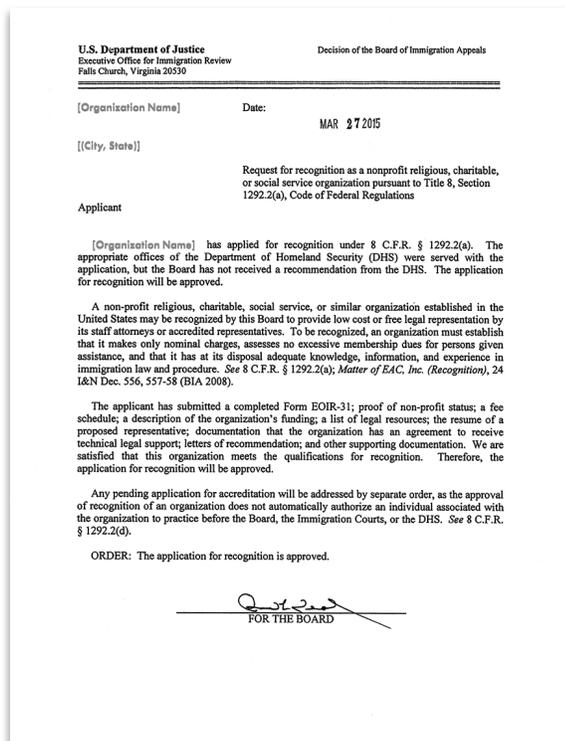
Ask to see their attorney licensing documents. In order to practice before the immigration court, attorneys must have an Executive Office for Immigration Review identification number. Most states give attorneys bar numbers. They may have this number on a license card or it may just be a number the attorney gives you. Next, visit [americanbar.org](http://americanbar.org) to look for their specific state bar association. Once you locate the association's website or phone number, search or call to see if he/she is in "good standing." Good standing means the attorney is currently registered with the state bar association and is allowed to work with clients.



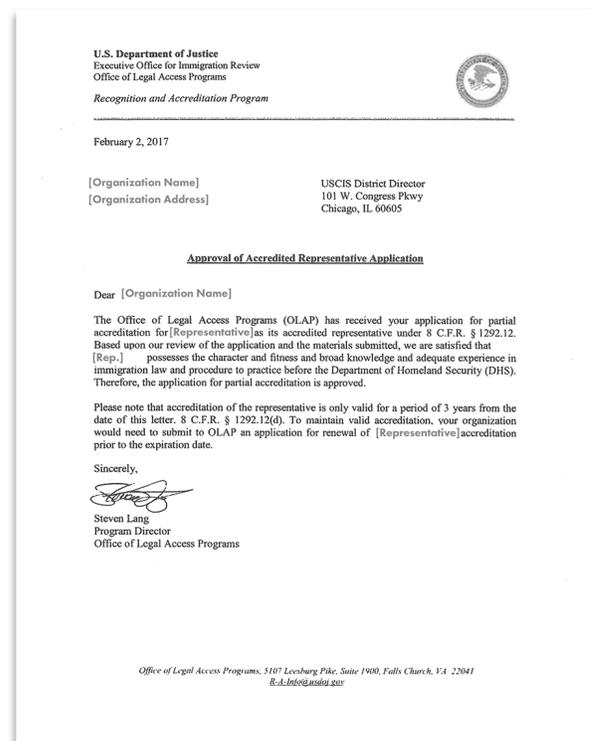
Many state bar associations distribute cards. They will look different state to state and not every state will have one. Here are some examples. Check that your attorney is in good standing. An attorney may also have a certificate from the circuit court in which they have been admitted and a degree from the law school from which they graduated.

## How can you check to make sure someone is accredited by the DOJ?

You can check both organizations' recognition and the individuals' accreditation by asking to see a copy of the letter where the DOJ gave its official approval. Also, the lists of recognized organizations and accredited individuals are available online at [justice.gov/eoir/recognition-accreditation-roster-reports](http://justice.gov/eoir/recognition-accreditation-roster-reports). Make sure to pay attention to the individual's type of accreditation. They can be either be fully accredited or partially accredited.



An example of an organization's recognition letter.



An example of a representative's accreditation letter.