

How Do You Qualify For Legal Aid?

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Legal aid is free assistance to individuals who have low-income but have a need for non-criminal related services. In the usual case, US citizens can qualify for legal aid if the legal assistance that they need is for a civil matter such as consumer rights or a divorce.

There are also a huge network of legal aid offices and Community Legal Clinics, spread across the country to assist those in need of legal assistance. However, not everyone will be entitled to free legal aid, you must first qualify for it.

First of all, the legal aid office will look at your personal financial circumstances to decide if you qualify. As every situation is different, it all depends on your family responsibilities and your monthly expenses. For instance, if your legal situation is serious and you have little or no money left after you pay for the necessities like transport and lodging, it is likely that you will be able to qualify for it. In addition, people with no income or are unemployed are also very likely to qualify financially for legal aid.

For people with little income or money, legal aid is offered to them free of charge. People who have a little money but insufficient to hire a lawyer may have to contribute some money out of their own pockets. In this case, you will be asked to sign a Payment Agreement which states the terms of payment to the legal aid office. There are a few choices open to you. You may wish to pay legal aid a certain amount or pay

a lump sum of money every month. You can also opt to have a lien put on your house or property. In other words, you agree to pay legal aid back when you sell or refinance your house, when you renew the mortgage on your house or within five years, whichever comes first.

As mentioned earlier, not everyone will be able to obtain free legal aid. If you do not qualify for legal aid, you can still approach the Community Legal Clinics for assistance. These clinics have lawyers and trained legal workers to give you advice and represent you. The cases they deal with include housing, (landlord and tenant) social assistance (welfare), pension, Worker's Compensation, employment insurance and immigration and employment rights issues. If your case falls within one of these categories, you can go to your nearest community legal clinic to obtain more information.

Another alternative is that you can go back to the legal aid office and approach them for an appeal form. After filling up the appeal form, you will get an appointment to speak to the area committee. This usually takes place in about two or three weeks. At the meeting with the committee (which comprises a group of three lawyers), you will have to defend your decision to file for an appeal and convince them to grant you the legal aid.

For your application to be completed, it will take around two to three weeks. Your lawyer cannot officially start working on your file until he has a legal aid certificate.

If your situation is an emergency, you will have to inform the legal aid staff who will help you to fill out another application. This will enable them to tell you right away whether you can get legal aid. If you already have a lawyer, legal aid will mail the certificate directly to your lawyers. If you do not have a lawyer, it is recommended that you approach one while waiting for your certificate.

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