

How to Choose a Lawyer for Your Social Security Disability Case

Getting Social Security disability benefits can be a long and complicated process. You will work closely with your lawyer and her staff. Before you hire a lawyer you must do your homework. The following steps will help you find a lawyer who can best meet your needs.

1. Get as much information as you can before you talk to a lawyer. First, go to her website. Is there helpful information on the website about the process you will go through to get Social Security disability benefits? Or is the website just about the lawyer and her law firm? You want a lawyer who will share helpful information and teach you about the Social Security disability process.
2. When you call the lawyer's office, how are you treated? Is this staff rushed or do they treat you like a welcomed visitor? Is this staff helpful? Empathetic? The lawyer sets the tone for the office. How her staff treats you is a good indication of how the lawyer will treat you.
3. You should meet with the lawyer, either in person or in a telephone consult if it is too difficult for you to get to the office. Were you given a choice? You should be!
4. When you talk to the lawyer ask about her experience handling Social Security disability cases. How long has she been handling these cases? What percent of her practice involves Social Security disability cases? Some lawyers only devote a small percentage of their time to these cases, making it difficult for them to keep up with changes in the rules and regulations. In addition, they may not be as familiar with the judges who hear, and ultimately rule on, these cases. You should look for a lawyer who devotes 50% or more of her time to Social Security disability cases.
5. Ask the lawyer what her success rate is for Social Security disability cases. No lawyer wins every case and no lawyer can guarantee a specific result in your case. Each case is different and must be evaluated on its own facts. You want to ask this question to get an idea of how carefully the lawyer evaluates these cases throughout the process. Social Security disability cases are won or lost on the medical evidence. A thorough disability lawyer will consistently evaluate the evidence to determine if she can prove that you are disabled. If the evidence does not support the claim a good disability lawyer will tell you so and not take the case further unless additional evidence is available. You should look for an attorney with an 85% + success rate.
6. Ask the lawyer if she has any trial experience. Trial lawyers are trained to develop evidence, present it in the court room and argue the case to a judge or jury. Social Security disability cases may go to a hearing with an Administrative Law Judge. It is beneficial to have a lawyer with trial experience representing you in these cases.
7. Ask the lawyer if she has any medical or nursing training. Social Security disability cases are won or lost based on the medical evidence and the evidence of physical or psychological limitations. A lawyer with medical knowledge will understand your disabling condition and be in a better position to develop the evidence and present it to the judge.
8. Ask the attorney how she will develop your case. You want to know that your lawyer will gather your pertinent medical records **throughout** the process, not just before your hearing with

an Administrative Law Judge. In addition, your lawyer should collect specific information from your treating doctors about the limitations that prevent you from working. Your lawyer will do this through the use of special disability reports and disease questionnaires. These reports will help to strengthen your case. If the lawyer you interview is not going to take these additional steps to gather evidence, you should keep looking.

9. Ask the lawyer why she chose to work on Social Security disability cases. The answer to this question is very telling. For me, helping clients get their disability benefits is one of the greatest joys in practicing law. I know that my staff and I can make a difference in our clients' lives. They come into my office troubled, frustrated, worried and in pain. We work through the process together and there is no better feeling than calling a client to report that they have been approved for Social Security disability benefits.

10. Ask the lawyer who will be working on your case. The lawyer should have staff to help gather your medical records and develop the evidence. Social Security disability cases are document intensive. It is important that there is sufficient staff to maintain and file all of the necessary documents.

11. How are you treated by the lawyer? Do you feel welcomed or do you feel like a number? Ask who you can talk to if you have questions as the case develops. When can you expect a return phone call? Phone call should be answered within 24 hours. While the attorney may not be able to return every phone call herself there should be sufficient staff available to answer your questions.

12. Do you feel comfortable with the lawyer and her staff? You are entering a long-term relationship so you must feel comfortable. During the initial consultation, were your questions answered? Were you treated with respect? Was the Social Security disability process described and explained to your satisfaction? Were the office procedures explained? If the answer to any of these questions is no, should keep looking.

13. What do the lawyer's clients say about her? Go to her website. Are there testimonials from former clients? Is she willing to let you contact other clients for a reference? The best way to understand how you will be treated is to talk to other clients.

For most people trying to get Social Security disability benefits, hiring a lawyer is the best thing they can do to improve their chances of winning. However, you need to have the lawyer who is right for you. Taking the time to gather the information outlined above will help you to make the right decision.

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