

Finding a Pro Bono Attorney

STEP ONE: Guide to First Contact

1. **Check the organization website** for general information, including:
 - Phone number to call
 - When to call (call-in days/hours)
 - Option to send an email
 - Eligibility criteria (some organizations offer their services to certain people only, for ex. LGBTQ or citizen of specific countries)
 - Other services offered beyond legal representation
 - **Note:** Some websites are available in languages other than English - for example, the Central American Legal Assistance (CALA) website can be read in English or Spanish, HIAS offers 10 language options, Lutheran Social Services has more than 100, etc. However, be prepared to make contact in English. See more below.

2. When you call, you will **have to leave a message or speak to someone. Be prepared!**
 - Make sure there will be no background noise or distractions.
 - Follow the prompts on the recorded message - including language options if any.
 - If you are not sure/not ready the first time you call, hang up and redial when you are sure you are in the right place and you are ready to leave your message.
 - Speak slowly and clearly.
 - You can practice your message a few times on your own to be comfortable - you can also practice with someone to make sure they understand you clearly
 - **Note:** If you do not speak English or Spanish well, it is best to ask for the help of someone who speaks English fluently and will be able to leave a message on your behalf. **You can also ask for an interpreter to be available at the time of the intake call back.**

3. Make a list of the things you **have to say in your message:**
 - Your name
 - Your contact info (telephone number where you can receive phone calls or text messages)
 - Your country of origin
 - The date of your arrival in the US (month/day/year)
 - Your visa/entry status **and expiration date (past or future)**
 - Your borough address in the US (for ex. Bronx, Brooklyn)**
 - Say you are looking for legal representation to apply for asylum
 - Your basis (ground) for your asylum claim: race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership to a particular social group (sexual orientation, FGM, HIV, disability, or other - explain briefly)
 - At the end, repeat your name and your contact information

4. Examples of voice messages:

- *"Hello, my name is <NAME>, my telephone number is <(123) 456-7890>. I come from <COUNTRY> and arrived in <CITY> on <DATE> on a <TOURIST VISA> which <EXPIRED LAST WEEK>. I live in <THE BRONX>. I am looking for legal representation to apply for asylum because of <MY RELIGION> which is under persecution in my country. Thank you for calling me back or leaving me a text message. Again, my name is <NAME> and my telephone number is <(123) 456-7890>."*

- *"Good morning, my name is <NAME> and I can be reached at <(012) 345-6789>. I am a citizen of <COUNTRY> and I am in the US in <QUEENS, NY>, since <DATE> on a <STUDENT VISA> which <EXPIRES IN 3 MONTHS>. I am looking for legal representation to apply for asylum because I was persecuted in my country for my <POLITICAL OPINIONS>. Please call me back or leave me a text message at your convenience. Again, my name is <NAME> and my telephone number is <(012) 345-6789>. Thank you."*

5. Some organizations offer you the option of sending an email message (for ex. Catholic Charities of New York at <https://catholiccharitiesny.org/find-help-form>, Bronx Defenders at <https://www.bronxdefenders.org/contact/>). If you have the option to send an email, include the exact same information as noted above (name and contact information only once).
6. As soon as you are done with this first step (first contact), **get ready for the second step** (intake call or telephone screening with a staff member) because you don't know when you might be called back - it could take a few hours to a few weeks. [Check out our online guide to prepare for an intake call.](#)
7. **Make a list of every organization you contacted** with the date of your call/email and any other information relevant to that contact.
8. **Follow the organizations** you contacted on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or other social media. You can also sign up for their email list and receive updates on their activities and services.
9. **The more prepared you are, the better your chances that the organization will agree to represent your asylum case, so it is well worth the effort.**