

A Maryland Judiciary Production
My Laws, My Courts, My Maryland
Finding Legal Help in a Criminal Case

Chapter Headings

Introduction

Hire a Lawyer in Private Practice

Apply for the Public Defender

Let's Review

Introduction

Hello and welcome. If you have been charged with a crime it is essential that you get help from a lawyer. The United States Constitution guarantees everyone a right to a lawyer in a criminal case. Even if you plan to plead guilty, a lawyer can help you understand your rights and aspects of your case that you may not know about. In this video, you will learn about two ways to get help from a lawyer in a criminal case. You can hire a lawyer in private practice, or you may apply for representation by the Office of the Public Defender. Let's get started.

Hire a Lawyer in Private Practice

If you want a lawyer to represent you in a criminal case, you can start by contacting lawyers in private practice. These lawyers will charge you a fee for their services. A good place to search for a private lawyer is through a referral service. The referral service will try to match you with a lawyer who has experience with criminal cases. You can then meet with that lawyer for a low fee. At the meeting, the lawyer will evaluate your case. They may quote you a price for their services. You can choose to hire that lawyer or search for a different one. A complete list of lawyer referral services by county is available online at www.msba.org.

Apply for the Public Defender

Now let's discuss what to do if you cannot afford to hire a lawyer. You can apply for representation by the Office of the Public Defender. If your application is accepted, a lawyer will be assigned to represent you. Following an arrest, you may be asked to apply before a bail review hearing. Even if you do not apply at that time or if you were not arrested, you may still apply any time after being charged. In some cases, where your application was rejected, you may reapply. You may reapply, for example, if you had a change in financial circumstances such as a loss of income.

Applications must be submitted to a District Court Commissioner. Only in a few specific circumstances that we will discuss later should you apply to the Public Defender directly. Submit your application at any Commissioner's office in the state. Office locations can be found at mdcourts.gov/district/pdinfo. You may also call 1-833-453-9799 for location information.

The application is available at the commissioner's office and online at mdcourts.gov/district/pdinfo. Submit the [application](#), along with an [Informed Consent Release form](#). Be sure to bring documents that establish you are eligible for their help when you apply including:

- The court charging documents or traffic tickets.
- Trial date notices from the Court.

- If you are employed bring written proof of salary, such as pay stubs, or other verification of income for the last two pay periods.
- If you are unemployed bring proof of public assistance. This may be documentation of medical assistance, Social Security, or other assistance you are receiving.

If the District Court Commissioner determines that you are eligible, you will receive a Final Qualification in writing. Once you have received your Final Qualification, all questions should be directed to the Public Defender's Office. Contact information will be written on the Final Qualification.

Apply to the public defender directly if you need help with one of the following case types: Child in Need of Assistance also called "CINA cases," a case where you have been charged with violating probation, or an appeal. Apply to the Public Defender if you are a minor but your case is not being heard in adult criminal court. We call these juvenile delinquency cases. Visit the Office of the Public Defender website www.opd.state.md.us or call 1-877-430-5187 for more information.

One last thing before we review. Do not wait to look for help with your case. If you do not have a lawyer on your trial date, you may have to go forward without one.

Let's Review

Let's review what you have learned. There are two ways to get help from a lawyer for your criminal case. First, you can hire a lawyer in private practice. These lawyers will charge a fee for their services. A referral program can help you begin your search. Second, if you cannot afford to hire a lawyer you may apply for representation by the Public Defender. If your application is accepted, you will be assigned a lawyer. Submit your application at any District Court Commissioner's Office. Thanks for watching.

Words: 784 Approximate Run Time: 5.6 minutes Reading Level: 6