

Immigration Lawyer

Help people stay, work or become citizens, in a system where a paperwork mistake can end a life here.

TYPICAL PAY

\$159,670

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$78k to \$352k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

7 to 8 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Small firms, nonprofits, immigration courts, detention centers, video h...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
Grades matter, because your college grade point average is half of your law school application. Start a language now, ideally Spanish.
- 2 Bachelor's degree, any major** 4 years
Law schools do not require a specific subject. Pick something you will get a high GPA in and that makes you read and write a lot.
- 3 LSAT (Law School Admission Test)** Months of preparation
The only admission test accepted by every accredited law school, and the strongest predictor of first-year performance. Your score decides both where you get in and what it costs.
- 4 Law school** 3 years
Three years for the professional law degree. Take the immigration clinic, where you represent real clients under supervision, and intern at a nonprofit each summer.
- 5 Bar exam and admission** Summer after graduation
Pass your state's bar exam, clear the character and fitness review, get sworn in. Then start practicing.

Pros and cons

- + Real responsibility and courtroom experience within your first year
- + One state license covers this work nationwide
- + Nonprofit and government work qualifies for federal loan forgiveness
- Pay is at the low end of law while the debt is the same size
- The rules change with every administration, sometimes overnight
- Clients arrive traumatized and you carry some of that home

Optional boosts

A second language spoken fluently. Certification as an immigration law specialist. Membership of the immigration bar association. Detention and removal defense experience.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Lawyers (23-1011.00)
American Immigration Lawyers Association
National Conference of Bar Examiners: the Uniform Bar Examination
United States Citizenship and Immigration Services

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/immigration-lawyer>

Good to know

The bar exam is changing right now

Most states are moving from the long-standing Uniform Bar Examination to a redesigned NextGen version between July 2026 and July 2028. It keeps a multiple-choice section but leans harder on real...

The immigration bar association is almost 80 years old

The American Immigration Lawyers Association was founded in 1946 and now supports attorneys, law students and paralegals with training, a research library and practice alerts when the rules shift.



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