# Finding Legal Help for Your Special Needs Trust

We understand that finding the right attorney to create your **Trust** and **Will / Estate Plan** can feel daunting, even overwhelming.When you're not personally connected with someone in the legal field, knowing where to start your search can seem almost scary.You're not alone in feeling this way – many families face this same challenge when preparing for their Special Needs Trust.

While Proxy Parent Foundation **don't refer or recommend** specific attorneys for you, we wanted to provide this resource to help you get started on your search with confidence. The resources shared here are not all-inclusive, but they offer a solid foundation if you don't know where to begin your journey.

Once you find the attorney you want to work with, we have a separate document with "Bridging Language" that will help your attorney prepare your documents to align perfectly with what we need to establish the Special Needs Trust for your beneficiary. This ensures seamless coordination between your estate planning and the Special Needs Trust setup.

**Important Notice**

This resource list is provided for informational purposes only.We cannot provide legal advice or directly refer specific attorneys.These resources can help you find qualified estate planning attorneys to establish wills and trusts prior to creating your Special Needs Trust.

## California State Bar Certified Lawyer Referral Services

### Statewide Services

- **California State Bar Certified Lawyer Referral Services Directory**
  - Website: https://www.calbar.ca.gov/Public/Need-Legal-Help/Certified-Lawyer-Referral-Services-Directory
  - Phone: (800) 843-9053 or (213) 765-1200 (Attorney Complaint Hotline - for general State Bar inquiries)
  - Information:The State Bar maintains a directory of certified lawyer referral services throughout California
- **Attorney Search Network**
  - Website: https://www.attorneysearchnetwork.com/
  - Phone: Contact through website
  - Service: California State Bar Certified Lawyer Referral Service that connects clients with pre-screened attorneys
  - Coverage: Statewide

## Regional Bar Association Referral Services

## Northern California

- **Bar Association of San Francisco - Lawyer Referral & Information Service (LRIS)**
  - Phone: (415) 989-1616
  - Hours: Monday-Friday 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM; 1:30 PM – 4:30 PM PST
  - Website: https://www.sfbar.org/lris/need-a-lawyer/
  - Services: Lawyer referrals with consumer protection standards
- **Santa Clara County Bar Association - Lawyer Referral Service**
  - Phone: (669) 302-7803
  - Hours: Monday-Friday 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM; Saturday 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM
  - Website: https://www.sccba.com/lawyer-referral/
  - Fee: $45 administrative fee
  - Service: Online 24/7 with attorney matching system
- **Alameda County Bar Association - Lawyer Referral Service**
  - Website: https://www.acbanet.org/need-a-lawyer/
  - Service: Pre-screened attorney referrals
  - Coverage: Alameda County area
- **Contra Costa County Bar Association**
  - Website: https://www.cccba.org/
  - Service: Lawyer Referral and Information Service (LRIS) with over 5,500 consultations annually
  - Coverage: Contra Costa County area

## Central California

- **Fresno County Bar Association - Attorney Referral Service**
  - Website: https://www.fresnocountybar.org/?pg=ClientReferrals
  - Consultation Fee: $50 (non-refundable as of March 2025)
  - Service: Attorney referrals with initial consultation appointments

## Southern California

- **Los Angeles County Bar Association (LACBA) - SmartLaw Lawyer Referral Service**
  - Phone: (213) 627-2727 (Main Office)
  - Website: https://lacba.org/?pg=smartlaw-lawyer-referral-service
  - Service: Founded in 1937, oldest and largest lawyer referral service in the area
  - Coverage: Los Angeles County
- **Beverly Hills Bar Association**

  - Coverage: Beverly Hills and surrounding areas
  - Contact through local bar association directory

- **Ventura County Bar Association - Lawyer Referral Service**
  - Website: https://www.vcba.org/public-lawyer-referral/
  - Service: Certified Lawyer Referral Service (State Bar Certificate No. 0059)
  - Coverage: Ventura County area
  - Note: In operation since 1959

## Self-Help and Educational Resources

### California Courts Self-Help

- **Website**: https://selfhelp.courts.ca.gov/wills-estates-probate/legal-documents
- **Services**: Information about estate planning, wills, and advance care planning
- **Coverage**: Statewide educational resources

### California Attorney General's Office

- **Website**: https://oag.ca.gov/consumers/general/estate-finance
- **Services**: Consumer information about estate planning, wills, and trusts
- **Note**: Does not provide legal advice to individuals

## California 2-1-1 Service

California's 2-1-1 service operates in 28 counties across the state and provides another excellent resource for finding affordable legal assistance. This free, confidential service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and is available in multiple languages. Simply dial 2-1-1 from your telephone and a live representative can assist you with legal resources in your area. The specialists provide personalized assistance and can connect you with local legal aid organizations, pro bono services, and affordable attorney options that may not be widely advertised.

You can read more about 2-1-1 services at https://211ca.org/ or find your specific local 2-1-1 office at https://211ca.org/find-your-local-211/.

### Justia Legal Aid Directory

- **Website**: https://www.justia.com/lawyers/estate-planning/california/legal-aid-and-pro-bono-services
- **Services**: Directory of estate planning legal aid and pro bono services throughout California
- **Coverage**: Statewide

### Cost Information for Client Reference

Based on current market research, estate planning costs in California typically range:

- **Simple Will**: $400 - $700
- **Basic Trust**: $1,500 - $3,000

- **Comprehensive Estate Plan** (will, trust, power of attorney, healthcare directives): $2,500 - $10,000+

*Note: Costs vary based on complexity, attorney experience, and geographic location*

**What to Look for in an Estate Planning Attorney**

When helping clients evaluate attorneys, suggest they consider:

- **Specialization**: Focus on estate planning, wills, and trusts
- **Experience**:Years of practice in estate planning law
- **Credentials**: State Bar certification and good standing
- **References**: Client testimonials or referrals
- **Communication**: Clear explanation of services and fees
- **Location**: Proximity to client for convenience

**Questions Clients Should Ask Potential Attorneys**

1. How long have you been practicing estate planning law?
2. What is your experience with Special Needs Trusts?
3. What are your fees for creating a Will and Trust?
4. How long does the process typically take?
5. Do you provide ongoing trust administration services?
6. Can you coordinate with our Special Needs Trust team?

**Additional Resources**

**Professional Organizations**

- **California State Bar**: https://www.calbar.ca.gov/
- **Estate Planning, Trust & Probate Law Section**: Professional organization for estate planning attorneys

**Important Reminders for Clients**

- Always verify attorney credentials through the State Bar of California
- Get fee agreements in writing before services begin
- Ensure the attorney has experience with estate planning and trusts
- Consider scheduling consultations with multiple attorneys before deciding

*This resource list was compiled to assist clients in finding qualified legal representation for estate planning needs. It is not an endorsement of any attorney or service, and clients should conduct their own due diligence when selecting legal counsel.*