

WHO'S REALLY IN YOUR CORNER?

What to know about buyer agreements before you tour a home.

Maureen Moran

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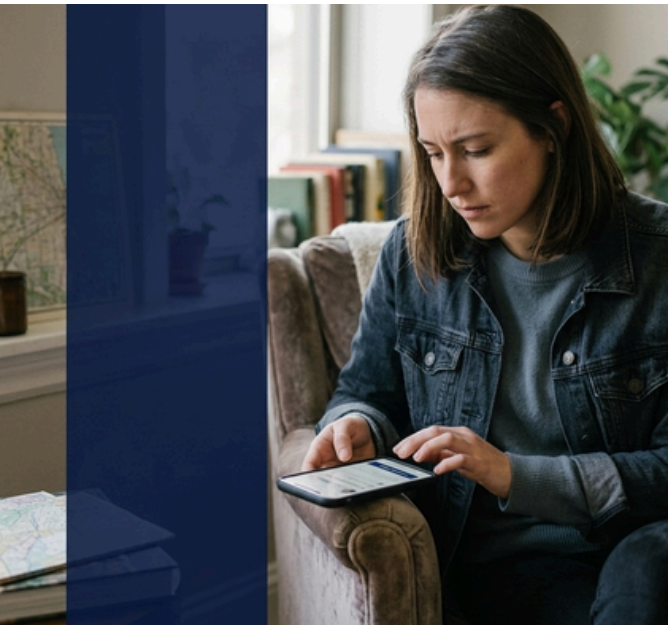
A THOUGHT BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Buying a home is one of the biggest decisions most people ever make. In Illinois, you'll sign a written agreement with the agent who helps you buy. This guide explains who works for whom, so you can choose with your eyes open.

As of January 1, 2025, Illinois law requires a written buyer representation agreement before any showing.
Understanding what you're signing — and why — puts you in a far stronger position from day one.

Representation means more than finding listings.
It means someone who is entirely in your corner.

WHO IS THIS FOR



Illustration

- You've been asked to sign a buyer representation agreement and want to understand what it means before you do.
- You're unsure what your agent can and can't do on your behalf — legally and practically.
- You've heard the term "dual agency" and want to know exactly what it means for your interests.
- You clicked "Contact Agent" on a listing website and assumed you were reaching the listing agent. (You may not have been.)

Listing websites are built to connect you with an agent, and that agent may not be the one who works for you.

THREE THINGS WORTH KNOWING FIRST

Before you look at a single home, here is what helps to know.

1

You'll sign a written agreement first.

In Illinois, you need a written buyer agreement with an agent before they can show you homes. It explains what your agent will do for you.

2

Not every agent in a deal works for you.

The listing agent works for the seller. That includes the friendly agent you may meet at an open house.

3

You can ask questions before you sign.

You can ask about any agreement before you sign it, and you should. A good agent will be glad you asked.

The pages ahead walk through each of these, one step at a time.

FOUR RELATIONSHIPS. ONE THAT PROTECTS YOU MOST.

Illinois law recognizes four kinds of agent relationships, and not all of them work for you. Here's what each one means for you as a buyer.

MOST PROTECTIVE

DESIGNATED AGENCY

A specific agent within a brokerage is designated solely to represent you. Your agent's full legal duty — loyalty, confidentiality, advocacy — belongs to you alone.

This is the relationship that gives you the clearest, most protected path through a transaction.

SELLER'S AGENT

This agent represents the seller. Their legal duty runs to the seller — not to you. They are required by law to act in the seller's best interest.

They may be courteous and helpful, but their loyalty is not yours.

What it cannot provide: Advocacy for your price, terms, or negotiating position.

DUAL AGENCY

One agent — or one brokerage — represents both buyer and seller in the same transaction. Both sides must agree to it in writing. Ask your agent and your attorney how and when that works.

In dual agency, your agent cannot fully advocate for either side. Advice on price and negotiation is limited.

What it cannot provide: Full advocacy, confidential strategy, or full loyalty.

NO AGENCY

You are working with a licensee who has no formal agency relationship with you. They may provide information, but owe you no legal duty.

This is the least protected position a buyer can be in during a transaction.

What it cannot provide: Any legal duty of loyalty, confidentiality, or advocacy.

⚠ Note: Dual agency limits the candid advice you can receive on offer strategy and pricing.

★★★★★

...I know I am getting someone incredibly knowledgeable, honest open and trustworthy, and someone who will advocate for me and have my back throughout the whole buying/selling/renting (I've done it all with Maureen!) process.

— Lauren F., River North
Zillow review, 2019

HOW THE RELATIONSHIPS COMPARE

FEATURE	DESIGNATED AGENCY	DUAL AGENCY	NO AGENCY
Advocates for you	✓	Limited	—
Keeps your info confidential	✓	Limited	—
Can advise on offer strategy	✓	Limited	—
Can negotiate on your behalf	✓	Limited	—
Required written agreement	✓	✓	—

Only a buyer's agent works for you.
In Illinois, that's designated agency.



WHAT YOU'RE SIGNING, AND WHAT TO ASK

I. WHO REPRESENTS YOU

The agreement formally establishes that I — as your designated agent — owe you a full legal duty.

It puts your protection in writing before we ever walk through a door.

II. WHAT SERVICES YOU'LL RECEIVE

The agreement outlines exactly what I will do on your behalf: property search, market analysis, offer strategy, negotiation, and guidance through closing.

So you know exactly what to expect.

III. COMPENSATION

The agreement specifies how buyer agent compensation is structured. It is negotiable and not set by law — and in many transactions, the seller chooses to participate in covering it.

IV. DURATION

The agreement has a defined term. We discuss what makes sense for your timeline — whether that's a single showing or a full search period — before anything is signed.

You may take any agreement to your own attorney before signing. I encourage it. That's what working with someone entirely in your corner looks like.

WHAT MANY BUYERS MAY NOT SEE

WHAT PUBLIC LISTING SITES SHOW

- Active MLS listings
- Public price history (often incomplete or delayed)
- Agent contact buttons, which may not reach the listing agent

WHAT PRIVATE NETWORKS CAN OFFER

- Some listings aren't available to every agent. Some homes are shared quietly before they ever go public.
- Top Agent Network: open only to top-producing agents
- Members can share homes before, or without, a public listing. I'm a member.
- Chicago's MLS Private Listing Network, plus full pricing history and building details.
- Through the Compass group, I can also see coming-soon homes across its Chicago brokerages.



★★★★★

"It hadn't hit the market yet — Maureen found the listing on the Top Agent Network. Since I was one of the first buyers to see the property, I had more time to think it through. This was a real advantage and made the process less stressful."

— First-time buyer, Avondale
Zillow review

A SIMPLE READINESS CHECK

Before you write an offer, check these six things. If most of them feel true, you'll be ready when the right home comes along.

- ☑ I know the agent at an open house represents the seller, not me.
- ☑ I understand what a buyer representation agreement is and why Illinois now requires it before showings.
- ☑ I know the difference between designated agency and dual agency.
- ☑ I want an agent who gives candid advice — not just access to listings.
- ☑ I know buyer agent compensation is negotiable and can often be covered by the seller.
- ☑ I want representation that protects my interests from the first tour through closing.

A CLOSING THOUGHT

The right person in your corner makes the whole process calmer. Ask questions. Read what you sign. And choose someone whose job is to look out for you.

WHAT CLIENTS SAY

★★★★★

"Definitely recommend working with Maureen. This was my first home purchase and she was incredibly patient... I never doubted her integrity, knowledge and her relationships in the industry."

— C.L., Avondale

★★★★★

"Look no further, Maureen is the real deal. She embodies everything you'd want in a realtor: honesty, professionalism, and knows the business better than most."

— M.C., Bucktown

★★★★★

"Maureen is someone of amazing integrity and insight and worthy of your trust. She handled the sale of my property flawlessly at every step, and was proactive about every aspect of the process. She has cultivated relationships with trusted contractors that she recommended to get our property ready for sale, and handled so many things herself, just to make sure things were done with high quality but at a reasonable cost. At every moment I knew she put my best interests first and foremost. Bottom line, if Maureen is on it, you can rest easy. The job will get done with minimum friction and maximum benefit to you. Couldn't be happier."

— A.S., Wicker Park

★★★★★

31 verified reviews across Google, Zillow and Realtor.com

ABOUT YOUR GUIDE AUTHOR

Maureen Moran

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I've been licensed in Illinois since 1995 and have helped more than 500 families navigate some of the most significant decisions of their lives. Before real estate, I was a teacher — and that background shapes everything about how I work with buyers. I believe that knowledge and a deeper understanding empower confident decision-making.

I serve buyers across Chicago — Lincoln Park, Old Town, Lakeview, Gold Coast, Bucktown, Wicker Park, River North, and beyond.

Over my career, I've been recognized among top-producing agents, and I'm a member of the Top Agent Network, a private network for top agents. I hold several NAR designations and built this guide because buyers deserve to understand the rules of representation before they need them.

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Illustration

WHEN YOU'RE READY TO TALK

When the conversation is ready to move forward, I'm here. No timeline, no pressure, just an honest look at what's possible.

Have questions about a buyer agreement? Let's talk. I'll walk you through what it means for you.

Scan to book

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Deciding what comes next
"Should I Sell Now, or Wait?" · "Rightsizing Thoughtfully"

Getting ready to sell
"What's Worth Fixing — and What Isn't"

Living in a condo building
"Running the Building You Live In"

IF YOU'RE BUYING OR MOVING HERE

How buying works
"Buying a Home in Chicago" · "Who's Really in Your Corner?" · "Buying Into the Building"

What it really costs
"Making Sense of Chicago's Closing Costs" · "Navigating the Chicago Property Tax System"

Settling in
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