

THINGS YOU CAN DO TO PROTECT YOURSELF

- ✓ Never sign any blank application papers.
- ✓ Never sign any paper or immigration form that you do not fully understand. (Get someone you trust to translate it for you.)
- ✓ Always demand a written contract for any immigration services.
- ✓ Do not sign a contract that you don't understand.
- ✓ Watch out for anyone who wants you to pay immediately.
- ✓ Always get copies of the papers prepared for you.
- ✓ Never let anyone keep your original documents (Example: birth certificates, marriage certificates).
- ✓ Get a complete itemized receipt for any money you pay.
- ✓ Never work with someone who will not answer your questions.
- ✓ If the services are going to cost over \$1,000.00 make sure you get a written contract.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!

Anyone offering immigration help must follow certain laws. These are some of the most important ones:

A person who says he/she is a lawyer must be registered with the State Bar of California. You can ask to see his/her license and write down the Bar number, and you can call the State Bar to find out if the license is valid.

A person who does immigration papers but is not a lawyer is called an immigration consultant. He/she must obey these laws:

1. Give you a written contract that:
 - ✓ Is in your own language;
 - ✓ Says you can cancel for any reason within 72 hours;
 - ✓ Says how much money you have to pay; and
 - ✓ Says what kind of application the person will file for you.
2. Pay a \$50,000 bond to the Secretary of State and give you proof of the bond.
3. Have a big sign in his/her office saying he/she is not an attorney and showing that the bond has been paid.
4. Never pretend to be a lawyer.
5. Never say he/she has special influence with INS.
6. Never file any document for you without going over it with you and explaining it to you.
7. Never keep your original documents and refuse to return them unless you pay.
8. Never tell you to lie on an application.

What to do if someone has cheated you:

If the person cheating you is a lawyer, call the State Bar where he/she is licensed.

In California, that number is: (800) 843-9053

If the person cheating you is not a lawyer, you can call:

Attorney General's Hotline

(Office of Immigration Assistance): (888) 587-0557,

and your city's police dept. or

the District Attorney's Office

Consumer Protection Unit: (714) 834-3600

Office of the Orange County District Attorney

Tony Rackauckas
District Attorney

This project was supported by Grant # 2001-PP-CX-0014 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office for Victims of Crime. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the United States Department of Justice.



IMMIGRATION FRAUD

ORANGE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

WATCH OUT FOR IMMIGRATION SCAMS!

Be careful when getting someone to help you with your immigration papers. Don't be fooled by false promises. You could lose your money and end up being removed from the United States.

WATCH OUT if someone says:

- ✗ We can get you work permits right away.
- ✗ We offer no risk immigration.
- ✗ We can get U.S. visas for you and your family in a few weeks.
- ✗ We know people at INS and can get your papers done quickly.
- ✗ We know of a special program that is not advertised.
- ✗ We can qualify you for political asylum (Mexican citizen).
- ✗ We only accept cash.
- ✗ We can't get to it right now, leave everything and we will give you copies and receipts later.

...THESE ARE LIES!

Most are hard working individuals who simply cannot afford an attorney. Regardless of immigration status, victims have a right to protection against fraud.

Knowledge of the basic, current rules is the best protection. There are currently no known available legal alternatives and very limited amnesty type programs. Political asylum application is NOT one of the options for Mexican citizens! If you and/or your loved ones have been victimized, please contact your local police department fraud unit to file your complaint.

IMMIGRATION FRAUD

An immigration consultant or Notary Public may not, with specific intent, use any language that when literally translated would imply that the consultant is an attorney. For example, "**notary public**" when translated literally into Spanish is "**notario publico**," which in many Latin American countries indicates the person is an attorney. "Licensed" can be translated into Spanish as the title "Licenciado," which also implies that the person is a lawyer. "Abogado" or "abogada" is also prohibited for non-lawyers. This rule applies to any document; stationery, advertising, letterhead, business card or any other business related written material.

When a "Notary Public" provides assistance with completing immigration forms, he/she is a licensed notary public. He/she violates the law when, with the intent to create the impression that he/she is a lawyer, his/her business cards are printed "Lic. John Doe" or has a sign outside his/her office reading "Notario Publico."

A Notary Public can have a sign in English reading "Notary Public," but he/she can charge only \$10.00 for each act he performs as a notary public.

There has been widespread misrepresentation and theft involving claims made by bonded and/or illegally operating **immigration consultants or Notary Publics** who promise quick "papers" or secret methods of legalization to unsuspecting victims. The problem of fraudulent claims has dramatically increased throughout Southern California in the last few years, partly because the immigrant population has become more susceptible due to widespread confusion over the available legal avenues.

The District Attorney's Office recommends that interested applicants for immigration services seek assistance from a qualified **immigration** attorney.

Victims of immigration fraud suffer serious consequences. Perhaps most important, the victim's immigration status can be permanently destroyed or damaged, preventing correct re-filing or amendment. Most of the victims are poor and may lose their life savings. They may turn over irreplaceable original documents to the consultant, never to see them again. Some "consultants" may be able to obtain a temporary social security number and driver's license for the applicant, and, consequently, a work permit for a short period of time based on the fraudulent filing. However, these benefits are only temporary with permanent consequences, which may include deportation.

The Orange County District Attorney's Office wants to help you protect yourself from immigration fraud. This office has a Consumer Fraud Unit that serves and protects consumers and legitimate businesses from unfair and fraudulent business practices impacting the community. This office also has community education service programs that provide outreach on a variety of crime prevention topics to the community. Victims of immigration fraud can range from undocumented immigrants seeking to legalize their status to citizens seeking to petition for family members.