

Fraudulent Schemes Target Immigrants, Spanish Speakers



As Attorney General, I am committed to fighting fraud against all Texas consumers, no matter what language they speak. I

am particularly appalled by the increasing number of scam artists who prey on Spanish speakers and those who come to Texas in hopes of calling it home.

My office receives many complaints from constituents who have been swindled out of hundreds and even thousands of dollars by people claiming to be immigration “consultants.” These so-called consultants often give legal advice and offer to fill out immigration paperwork, but fail to tell consumers that they are neither qualified nor authorized to provide these services.

One of the major reasons immigrants fall victim to these types of scams is a misunderstanding of the title, “notary public.” In Spanish, “notario publico” refers to an attorney who has been trained to handle complex legal documents. Unscrupulous notaries deliberately play upon that to trick Spanish speakers into thinking they

have legal expertise they do not actually have.

Of course, the vast majority of notaries public are law-abiding citizens. In Texas, notaries public are authorized to witness the signing of certain legal documents, such as contracts or wills. They do not necessarily have specialized legal training, and are not allowed to offer immigration consulting or other kinds of legal advice.

In Texas, only licensed attorneys and nonprofit organizations specifically accredited by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Board of Immigration Appeals can charge fees to advise and represent clients in immigration matters.

Since 2002, my office has shut down two dozen fraudulent “immigration consulting” operations. In May, a Dallas County court handed down an almost \$1 million judgment against the owner of Grupo ECSA. The court also barred the owner from ever providing such services again. More recently, in August a court ordered Midland-based Aplicacion de Oro to pay more than \$292,000 in fines and restitution for scamming hundreds of immigrants and their families out of thousands of dollars for unauthorized legal advice and representation in immigration matters.

We are pleased our efforts to end immigration scams have netted many court victories, but we believe this is only the tip of the iceberg. Many immigrant victims fear deportation and so these scams tend to go unreported. For this reason, my office works with local law enforcement, foreign consulates and legitimate advocacy groups to encourage victims to speak up so we can take action.

Immigration scams are not the only schemes that target Spanish-speaking consumers. We have tackled a mortgage services company that defrauded hundreds of Hispanic homeowners across Texas. We also have shut down credit card scams and companies that sold fraudulent international driver’s licenses to predominantly Spanish-speaking consumers. Another company sold home computers to Hispanic consumers in Austin and Dallas, falsely telling consumers the company was affiliated with their children’s schools.

These scammers shamefully exploit non-English speakers, assuming no one will find out about their lies. This is not the way Texans do business, and I will not tolerate this kind of activity in our great state.

Information on this and other topics is available on the Attorney General’s Web site at www.oag.state.tx.us.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

Immigration Scams

- “Notary Public” is NOT the same as “Notario Publico!”
- Notaries public are NOT authorized to offer immigration services or legal advice.

To report an illegal “immigration consultant”:

Office of the Attorney General
P.O. Box 12548
Austin, TX 78711
(800) 252-8011
www.oag.state.tx.us

For assistance with immigration paperwork:

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)
(800) 375-5283
www.uscis.gov

or contact a private attorney through the State Bar of Texas at (800) 204-2222

Additional assistance with immigration documents is available from USCIS-authorized advocacy groups. Assistance may also be available through religious organizations.



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