



California Department of Justice
Attorney General Xavier Becerra

Consumer Alert: Beware of Immigration Scams

Immigration law and procedures are complicated. If you hire someone who is not up to the job or who is dishonest, you or your loved ones may face unnecessary removal from the United States. Attorney General Xavier Becerra offers Californians the following tips to help protect themselves:

- **Do not hire a notary or an immigration consultant if you are seeking advice and assistance regarding your immigration status.** Notaries and immigration consultants are not attorneys or experts in immigration. In fact, they are not legally required to know anything about immigration law because they are only allowed to help you with non-legal tasks like translating information. They cannot – and should not – provide advice or direction about your immigration forms or speak to the government on your behalf.¹
- **Do not hire an immigration attorney until you confirm that the person is licensed to practice law.** Notaries and immigration consultants may fraudulently pretend to be immigration attorneys. To see if an attorney is licensed in California, check the State Bar of California website at <http://members.calbar.ca.gov/fal/membersearch/quicksearch>.
- **Do not pay for immigration forms.** Such forms can be requested for free by calling U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services at (800) 870-3676, or by visiting its website at <https://www.uscis.gov/forms>.
- **Get immigration information from dot-gov (.gov) websites** that are affiliated with the government. Information on dot-com (.com), dot-net (.net) or other websites may be wrong.
- **Do not pay for immigration services until you request and read a paper copy of your contract.** If you are not fluent in English, you have the right to review a translated copy of your contract before you sign it. The contract should set out the services that will be provided, as well as the amount that you will be charged. You have a right to keep a copy of the contract. In addition, each time you pay an immigration attorney, get a receipt that states what your payment covers and the remaining balance due.

¹ A notary is an individual who certifies or witnesses signatures on official documents. If you need information about immigration consultants and what they are permitted to do, please visit the California Secretary of State's website at <http://bpd.cdn.sos.ca.gov/immigration-consultants/immigration-consumers-brochure-english.pdf> and <http://www.sos.ca.gov/business-programs/immigration-consultants/>.

- **Be careful about giving your original documents to anyone** because the person you give them to may illegally refuse to return them unless you pay them money.
- **Do not sign an immigration form that includes incorrect information or blanks.** Before you sign any immigration forms, be sure that the forms are fully and accurately filled out.
- **Do not give money or any personal information to people who call on the telephone,** claiming that there is a problem with your immigration status. No federal or state agency, including the U.S. Customs and Immigration Services or Internal Revenue Service, will ever ask for your personal information or payment over the phone, by email, or text.
- **Keep copies of all documents associated with your immigration status,** including copies of the immigration documents that are filed and correspondence from the government regarding your immigration status.

What to do if you are the victim of an immigration scam

If you are the victim of an immigration scam, you are encouraged to do the following:

- Get assistance from a lawyer or from a legitimate legal aid organization. Helpful resources and assistance can be found at <https://www.lawhelpca.org/> or from the accredited organizations listed at <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/recognized-organizations-and-accredited-representatives-roster-state-and-city>.
- Share your story with our Office at <https://oag.ca.gov/report>. Complaint forms are available in English, Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese. When you provide information regarding your experience with immigration scams, the Attorney General is better informed and positioned to investigate and prosecute immigration fraud. You may also call (800) 952-5225 or send a letter to the following address:

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