

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM IMMIGRATION CONSULTANT FRAUD

Beware ... there are a lot of people who would like to cheat and trick you out of your hard earned money. In the process they could jeopardize your ability to apply for an immigration benefit or a right to relief.

So ... if you hire an immigration consultant or immigration assistance service provider, you need to take these important precautions to protect yourself from immigration fraud.

Make sure the person you hire is honest and legitimate and only performs basic non-legal immigration services for a small fee. Remember, immigration consultants and immigration assistance service providers are not attorneys, they do not work for a Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) recognized non-profit organization, and they cannot provide legal advice and legal services.

Do not trust people who claim to have a special relationship with USCIS or who guarantee results or faster processing. No organization or person offering help with immigration matters has a special relationship with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) and can guarantee results or faster processing.

If you use an immigration consultant or an immigration assistance service provider, obtain and keep a written contract. The contract should be in English and in your native language. The contract should list all the services that will be provided to you and how much each service costs. Ask for references before you sign the contract. Make sure you fully understand the contract before you sign it and that you can cancel it within 72 hours of signing it. Keep a copy of the contract for your records.

Avoid paying cash for the services of an immigration consultant or an immigration assistance service provider. Use a personal check, certified check or credit card to pay for the services of an immigration consultant or an immigration assistance service provider. Make sure you get a receipt anytime you make a payment and make sure that the receipt has the agency's or provider's name and address on it.

Never give your original documents (birth certificates, passports, or other documents) to anyone who is helping you with immigration matters. Make sure that

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you **ONLY** give COPIES of original documents to an immigration consultant or an immigration assistance service provider.

Never sign a blank form, application or petition. Make sure that you read and understand the application, form, or petition being filed for you with USCIS or other government agencies. Also, make sure you know what you are signing -- never sign any immigration document or any other document that you do not understand.

Do not sign any forms, applications, or papers containing any false statements or inaccurate information. Make sure that the information that you provide on forms, applications or papers is truthful and completely accurate and contains no false statements or inaccuracies.

Beware of anyone who advertises that he/she is a *notario* or a *notario publico* and can represent you in immigration proceedings. A *notario* or *notario publico* in the United States is a notary public, not an attorney, and is not authorized to give legal advice.

Beware of consultants, travel agencies, and real estate offices that offer legal services in immigration matters. Be sure to ask questions about the qualifications of consultants, travel agencies and real estate offices that offer to provide legal services. Make sure that you see copies of their attorney bar certificates or Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) accreditation letters before letting them give you legal advice and services.

Beware if the immigration consultant or immigration assistance service provider is splitting fees with an attorney in any matter. In most states with immigration consultant laws or immigration assistance service provider laws, it is illegal to charge a fee to refer a client to an attorney.

Know that the federal government has not yet passed any law that authorizes the legalization of undocumented individuals. No law has passed that gives undocumented individuals a legal way to obtain legal status. Beware of anyone who offers to file a legalization application for you as they may be putting you in danger of deportation.

Get help if an immigration consultant or an immigration assistance service provider has cheated you. If you have been cheated, you will need help. It is best to contact your local Catholic Charities office, immigrant rights group, or other trusted community organization to seek their advice. These organizations can help you figure out the best way to proceed. It might be necessary to contact your state or local prosecutor, state consumer affairs department, local bar association or other government agency or organization in your state.

Note: This handout is not legal advice. It is for educational and informational purposes only.