

PRINTABLE VERSION OF THE MARYLAND ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE
IMMIGRATION FRAUD WEB PAGE:

<http://www.oag.state.md.us/Consumer/immfraud/>

BEWARE OF IMMIGRATION FRAUD

Many noncitizens who might otherwise gain legal status and qualify for immigration benefits find they are permanently unable to obtain United States citizenship because of the illegal actions of an unlicensed immigration consultant.

You might have been a victim of immigration fraud if the person offering immigration assistance identified him or herself as a "notario," "visa consultant" or "licenciado." In the United States, a notary is NOT a lawyer and may not provide you with legal advice.

BE WARNED: While many legitimate community and religious organizations provide immigration-related services, non-lawyers who advertise as immigration consultants, notarios, notario publicos, or abogados are neither authorized nor qualified to provide legal advice or legal services concerning immigration matters.

HAVE YOU BEEN A VICTIM OF IMMIGRATION FRAUD?

Did you pay a very large fee for simple services?

Did you pay for services before they were performed?

Did you pay for your immigration forms?

Did the individual helping you call him or herself a "notario," "visa consultant" or "licenciado" and/or suggest he or she could provide legal advice/services?

Did the individual helping you promise special or favorable treatment from immigration officials?

Did the individual helping you promise to fill out and submit immigration applications and fail to do so, incorrectly submit the forms, provide incomplete or inaccurate information, or miss submission deadlines?

IF YOU HAVE ANSWERED YES TO ANY OF THE QUESTIONS ABOVE, YOU MIGHT HAVE A CLAIM OF IMMIGRATION FRAUD.

- To file a complaint: Go to <http://www.oag.state.md.us/Consumer/complaint.htm>; or

- Print out and mail in the form found at <http://www.oag.state.md.us/Consumer/complaintmail.htm>; or
- Call the Consumer Protection Division Hotline at (410) 528-8662 MON-FRI 9am - 3pm

HOW TO FILE A COMPLAINT & GET HELP

If you think you have been the victim of immigration fraud, you should file a complaint with our office. To file a complaint, you can:

Click here (<http://www.oag.state.md.us/Consumer/complaint.htm>) to file a complaint online

Click here (<http://www.oag.state.md.us/Consumer/complaintmail.htm>) to print, complete, and send in the form.

Call the Consumer Protection Division Hotline at (410) 528-8662 MON-FRI 9am - 3pm

You also can send us a letter describing your complaint, along with copies of relevant documentation to: Consumer Protection Division, 200 St. Paul Place, Baltimore, MD 21202. Please note that we are unable to accept complaints by email, but if you have questions or concerns about the complaint process, you can call our Consumer Protection Division Hotline during the hours of 9am to 3pm, Monday through Friday, at 410-528-8662 to speak with a representative.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Know your rights. Protect yourself. Avoid being scammed!

- Never pay for blank government forms. Government forms are free.
 - You can get FREE immigration forms at www.uscis.gov/forms, or by calling USCIS at 1-800-870-3676, or by visiting your local USCIS office.
 - You only have to pay when you submit forms to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS).
- Always ask for someone's credentials before you hire him or her.
 - Ask if the person is a licensed attorney, an accredited representative or an immigration consultant. Only a licensed attorney can provide legal services.
 - To check if someone is a licensed attorney in good standing in Maryland, contact the Client Protection Fund at (410) 260-3635 or at <http://www.courts.state.md.us/cpf/attylist.html>.
 - To check if someone is an accredited representative, go to <http://www.justice.gov/eoir/ra.html>.

- Never let anyone keep your original documents, like your birth certificate or passport. Scammers may demand you pay to get them back.
- Always keep a copy of every form that you submit, as well as every letter from the government about your application or petition.
- Never sign a form before it has been filled out, or a form that contains false information. Never sign a document that you don't understand.
- Always get a receipt from USCIS when you turn in your paperwork. Keep it! It proves that USCIS received your application. You will need the receipt to check on the status of your application so be sure you get a copy.
- Never pay for services before they are performed.

Maryland passed the Immigration Consulting Services Act in 2005. This bill prohibits unauthorized persons from providing legal services to noncitizens and people seeking to sponsor a noncitizen. It also requires an immigration consultant to provide you with a detailed written contract before she or he assists; and it requires an immigration consultant to post certain notices at his or her place of business, plus much more. Access the law here (<http://statutes.laws.com/maryland/commercial-law/title-14/subtitle-33>).

This is a national problem! Click here (<http://www.oag.state.md.us/Press/2011/060911.html>) to read our press release from June 2011 about a crackdown against one Maryland business and a nationwide, multi-agency campaign to combat immigration services scams.

FINDING IMMIGRATION ASSISTANCE

LAWYERS

Only lawyers can give you legal advice and represent you in court. Before selecting a lawyer, you should find out if he or she has been disciplined, suspended or expelled from his or her professional association for breaking the rules for lawyers.

Note: You should use a lawyer who is licensed in the state where you reside. To find a Maryland lawyer who works on immigration matters and is allowed to charge a fee to help you, go to www.aialawyer.com and see the list provided for Maryland. To find an immigration lawyer in Maryland who will provide services at no cost or at a low fee:

See the state-by-state list provided by the U.S. Department of Justice by going to www.justice.gov/eoir/probono/states.htm and clicking on Maryland; or

Call USCIS at 1-800-375-5283 and ask about lawyers in Maryland; or

See the state-by-state list provided by the American Bar Association: www.americanbar.org/groups/public_services/immigration/resources/immigration_legal_service_providers_directory.html and click on Maryland.

To confirm whether someone is a Maryland lawyer and check if he or she is in good standing in Maryland or has been disciplined for breaking the rules, call the Client Protection Fund at 410-260-3635. For a list of lawyers who are no longer allowed to practice law, see the list provided by the U.S. Department of Justice at www.justice.gov/eoir/discipline.htm.

IMMIGRATION CONSULTANTS

If you choose to use an immigration consultant, please note that he or she may NOT provide legal advice or legal services concerning an immigration matter. This means an immigration consultant may NOT provide you with immigration forms, complete immigration forms on your behalf, file immigration forms on your behalf, advise you to file immigration forms or apply for a benefit on your behalf.

- An immigration consultant may NOT state that he or she can or will obtain special favors from or has special influence with the U.S. Departments of Homeland Security, Labor, State, Justice, Commerce or any other State or Federal agency.
- An immigration consultant may NOT collect fees or compensation before services are performed.
- An immigration consultant may NOT refuse to return documents supplied, prepared or paid for by you.
- An immigration consultant may NOT represent in any manner that he or she possesses a title or credentials that would qualify him or her to provide legal advice or services.

For more information on what an immigration consultant can and cannot do, see [Maryland Immigration Consultant Act, Md. Code Ann. COMMERCIAL LAW §§ 14-3301 to 14-3306 \(http://statutes.laws.com/maryland/commercial-law/title-14/subtitle-33\)](http://statutes.laws.com/maryland/commercial-law/title-14/subtitle-33) . For a list of immigration consultants who have been previously disciplined, click here (<http://www.justice.gov/eoir/prev-discipline-english.htm>) and for those who are currently suspended click here (<http://www.justice.gov/eoir/discipline.htm>).

ACCREDITED REPRESENTATIVES

Accredited representatives are not lawyers. They work for an organization that's officially recognized and authorized by the U.S. government to give legal immigration advice. To find an accredited representative, visit www.justice.gov/eoir/ra.html. The people on this list are accredited representatives for as long as they continue to work at the organization named on the list. They may charge a fee to help you.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

The following organizations provide assistance in navigating the immigration process:

American Bar Association

- Commission on Immigration
Website: http://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_services/immigration.html
- Fight Notario Fraud Initiative
Website: http://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_services/immigration/projects_initiatives/fightnotariofraud.html

American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland Eastern Shore Project

Primary Address: 100 N Liberty St, Centreville, MD 21617-1021

General Phone: 410-758-1975

Fax: 410-758-1977

Web Site: <http://aclu-md.org>

CASA de Maryland

Primary Address: 8151 15th Ave., Hyattsville, MD 20783

General Phone: 301-431-4185

Fax: 301-408-4123

Website: <http://www.casademaryland.org/programs-mainmenu-73/guide-to-services2>

Catholic Charities

Esparanza Center

Primary Address: 430 S Broadway, Baltimore, MD 21231

General Phone: 410-522-2668

Website: <http://www.catholiccharities-md.org/immigrants/>

Homeless Persons Representation Project, Inc.

Primary Address: 300 Cathedral St, Ste 204, Baltimore, MD 21201-4407

General Phone: 410-685-6589 ext. 114

Intake Phone: 800-773-4340

Fax: 410-625-0361

Web Site: <http://www.hprplaw.org>

Maryland Bar Foundation, Inc. Montgomery County Pro Bono Program

Primary Address: 27 W Jefferson St, Rockville, MD 20850-4200

General Phone: 301-424-7651

Fax: 301-424-6724

Website: <http://www.montbar.org>

Public Justice Center

Primary Address: 1 North Charles Street, Ste 200, Baltimore, MD 21202-3559

General Phone: 410-625-9409

Fax: 410-625-9423

Website: <http://www.publicjustice.org>

University of Maryland School of Law

Immigration Clinic

Primary Address: 500 W. Baltimore Street, Baltimore, MD 21201-1786

General Phone: 410-706-3295

Fax: (410) 706-5856

Website: <http://www.law.umaryland.edu/programs/clinic/initiatives/immigration/>

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

For free copies of immigration forms, visit www.uscis.gov/forms.

In Spanish, the term "notario" refers to someone who can provide certain limited legal services. In English, the term "notary" refers to someone who can officially witness and authenticate signatures on documents. In the United States, a notary is NOT authorized to provide legal advice or services of any kind.

For free copies of immigration forms, visit www.uscis.gov/forms.