

□ **Be careful with your original documents.** Never give anyone your original documents unless you see proof that the federal government requires them. See <http://www.uscis.gov/forms/file-my-application-online-e-filing/how-do-i-know-if-i-need-original-documents>. Keep your originals in a safe place.

□ **Never sign anything unless you understand what it says.** Ask someone you trust to translate documents for you if necessary. A consultant should never file a document for you if you do not understand what the document says or why you are filing it.

□ **Beware of telephone scams.** Do not fall victim to telephone scammers posing as federal immigration officials.

□ **Beware of dot-com websites.** Some websites offering step-by-step guidance on completing an immigration status application or petition will falsely claim to be affiliated with federal immigration authorities.

#### *Questions? Want to file a complaint?*

- ❖ California Department of Justice  
Public Inquiry Unit, P.O. Box 944255  
Sacramento, CA 94244-2550 or  
<http://oag.ca.gov/contact/consumer-complaint-against-business-or-company>.
- ❖ United States Citizenship & Immigration Service (USCIS) 1-800-375-5283  
<http://www.uscis.gov/avoid-scams>
- ❖ Federal Trade Commission  
1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357)  
<http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/features/feature-0012-scams-against-immigrants>
- ❖ Your local District Attorney or county department of consumer affairs

*To verify that an immigration consultant has a \$100,000 bond as required by California law:*

- ❖ California Secretary of State

(916) 653-4984

[http://www.sos.ca.gov/business/sf/bond\\_search/](http://www.sos.ca.gov/business/sf/bond_search/)

*Walk away from a person who claims to be an immigration attorney but is unlicensed, or an organization or individual who claims to be accredited but is not. Only a non-attorney who is an accredited representative of an organization recognized by USDOJ can offer you legal advice and represent you in immigration proceedings. To see if a representative is accredited, check:*

- ❖ U.S. Department of Justice  
<http://www.justice.gov/eoir/ra/raroster-orgs-reps.pdf>

*To see if a person is an attorney licensed to practice law in California, enter the person's name here:*

<http://members.calbar.ca.gov/fal/MemberSearch/QuickSearch>

- ❖ *Note: attorneys licensed in other states may be eligible to assist you, so check websites of those states' bar associations.*

#### *For help in finding a lawyer:*

- ❖ State Bar of California  
1-866-442-2529 (866-44-CA-LAW)  
<http://www.calbar.ca.gov/Public/LawyerReferralservicesLRS.aspx>

*If you cannot afford to hire an attorney, you can find information on legal aid organizations near you:*

- ❖ U.S. Department of Justice Board of Immigration Appeals at  
<http://www.justice.gov/eoir/probono/states.htm>
- ❖ <http://www.immigrationlawhelp.org/>
- ❖ [lawhelpca.org](http://lawhelpca.org)

*For general information on new federal immigration orders:*

- ❖ <http://www.uscis.gov/immigrationaction> (English)
- ❖ <http://www.uscis.gov/es/accionmigratoria> (Español).

# IMMIGRATION SERVICES FRAUD KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!



Kamala D. Harris  
Attorney General  
State of California  
2015

If you need help with your immigration status, be careful who you hire. Only lawyers or accredited representatives (non-lawyers working with organizations approved by the U.S. Department of Justice [USDOJ]) can give legal advice and represent you in immigration court.

Immigration consultants -- who may also call themselves notaries public, *notarios* or paralegals -- are not lawyers or accredited representatives. It is against the law for them to give legal advice or represent you in court. An immigration consultant can only do non-legal tasks, like translate your answers to the questions on U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) forms, get copies of documents you need to file in court, and if you ask them to, submit the forms to USCIS.

If you still decide to hire an immigration consultant, beware of scam artists who can cause you to lose thousands of dollars and harm your immigration status.

*Some common scams by unscrupulous consultants:*

- ❖ Telling you the consultant has special influence with USCIS or another government agency. No one can move your application to the front of the line, guarantee you asylum, a work permit, deferred action, or any other immigration benefit.
- ❖ Posing as a lawyer or offering legal advice. Only attorneys or accredited representatives may give legal advice, including advice as to whether you are eligible for a change in immigration status, may select the appropriate form, or appear in court for you. Immigration consultants cannot legally do any of these things.
- ❖ Taking your money and not delivering any services.
- ❖ Charging money to refer you to a lawyer, unless they are certified by the California State Bar to do so. To find out if they are certified, call the California State Bar at (866) 442-2529, or find a certified referral service at <http://www.calbar.ca.gov/Public/LawyerReferralServicesLRS.aspx>

- ❖ Filing false or forged documents without your knowledge or convincing you to lie on an application or to a USCIS employee.
- ❖ Keeping your original documents and making you pay money to get the documents back.
- ❖ Requiring you to pay bogus "back taxes" or other fees not required by the government.
- ❖ Filing a frivolous application, such as filing an application for political asylum if you do not qualify.

**Questions you should ask when seeking help with your immigration case:**

1. Is the person offering you legal services (providing advice about your case, selecting forms to complete, or representing you in immigration proceedings)? If so, he/she she must either be (a) a lawyer eligible to practice law, or (b) an accredited representative, with permission from the USDOJ to represent persons in federal immigration proceedings.
  - a. If the person claims to be an attorney, ask what state he/she is licensed in and his/her state bar number and check on the state bar's website to confirm this and to see if he/she has been disciplined. The California State Bar's website is <http://members.calbar.ca.gov/fal/MemberSearch/QuickSearch>
  - b. If the person claims to be an accredited representative working with an organization recognized by the USDOJ, confirm this through the USDOJ website at <http://www.justice.gov/eoir/ra/raroster.htm>
2. Does the person claim to be an immigration consultant? If so, he/she **may not** advise you if you are eligible for a change in immigration status, select immigration forms for you or appear on your behalf in immigration proceedings.

**Checklist if you use an immigration consultant:**

- Immigration consultants must have a \$100,000 bond.** Ask the consultant to give you proof of the bond, and check with the Secretary of State to make sure it is valid. (Call (916) 653-4984 or check at [http://www.sos.ca.gov/business/sf/bond\\_search/](http://www.sos.ca.gov/business/sf/bond_search/)) Keep the bond number for your records.
- Do not sign blank documents
- Consult someone you trust before signing anything or paying any money.** Be suspicious of anyone who wants you to act immediately.
- You are entitled to a written contract in YOUR language.** Before a consultant performs any work, get a written contract in your language that is signed and dated by the consultant. Do not sign the contract unless it lists all the services you were promised and how much you are supposed to pay. Never agree to anything that is not put in writing.
- You can cancel the contract and get all of your money back within 72 hours of signing the contract.** You must cancel the contract in writing.
- Get receipts and copies of all forms/documents.** Get a dated receipt, signed by the consultant, showing what you paid for and how much you paid. Keep copies of the contract and receipt. The consultant must also give you copies of everything submitted on your behalf; these must contain the consultant's name and address.
- Do not pay for services that are free,** such as forms that can be downloaded from the USCIS website for free at <http://www.uscis.gov/forms> or ordered by calling USCIS at 1-800-870-3676. Be careful of websites that charge you for these forms.
- Be careful of persons who charge higher filing fees than USCIS,** claiming they can file your forms faster. USCIS processing times can rarely be shortened. To find out what the USCIS filing fees are, call 1-800-375-5283.