



IMMIGRATION SERVICES FRAUD

If you need help applying for immigration relief, be careful who you hire. Watch out for immigration scams that can cost you thousands of dollars and/or harm your immigration status! Here are some tips and resources to help:

TIPS

- **Do not hire an immigration consultant or notary.** Only lawyers, accredited representatives, and recognized organizations can give you legal advice or represent you in immigration court. Immigration consultants – who may call themselves immigration experts, *notarios*, notaries public, or paralegals – cannot do so. They cannot provide legal advice or direction with immigration forms, help you fill out forms, or assess your eligibility for different types of immigration relief. They also cannot speak to the government on your behalf. They can only do non-legal, clerical tasks, like translating information on forms.¹
 - **If someone claims to be a lawyer, confirm they are licensed.** Some immigration consultants may fraudulently call themselves immigration lawyers. If someone claims they are licensed in California or another state and can therefore practice immigration law, confirm they are licensed and in good standing in that particular state, visit https://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_services/flh-home/flh-lawyer-licensing/.
 - **If someone claims to be an accredited representative or recognized organization, confirm that information.** For a list of all accredited representatives and recognized organizations, visit [justice.gov/eoir/recognition-accreditation-roster-reports](https://www.justice.gov/eoir/recognition-accreditation-roster-reports).
- **Go to a legitimate legal aid organization for free legal help.** Many nonprofit organizations provide free immigration help to low-income individuals, such as those found through the resources below. To find a legal aid organization near you, go to lawhelpca.org. If you decide to pay someone instead, do not trust anyone who claims to be able to get special favors from the government or guarantees you a work permit or any other immigration benefit.
- **Do not pay for immigration services or sign anything until you understand your contract.** Do not trust anyone who wants you to act immediately. Don't agree to anything that is not put in writing and in a language you understand. If you are not fluent in the language the contract is in, ask that it be translated. You are entitled to a contract that lists all the services that will be provided and how much each service costs. Keep a copy of the contract and all receipts of your payments for your records.
- **Access information from “.gov” websites.** These are government affiliated. Information on websites that end with “.com”, “.net”, or other domains may be untrustworthy.
- **Do not pay for immigration forms.** You can get immigration forms for free from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) at uscis.gov/forms or (800) 870-3676.
- **Do not trust anyone who charges high filing fees or other fake fees.** You can find the USCIS's filing fees at uscis.gov/forms/filing-fees. Do not trust anyone who charges you higher filing fees. For example, some people claim they charge more to get your forms processed faster, but USCIS processing times can rarely be shortened. Do not pay bogus “back taxes” or other fees not actually required by the government.

1 If you need information about what immigration consultants are allowed and not allowed to do, visit sos.ca.gov/business-programs/immigration-consultants.



- **Do not sign documents that include incorrect information or blanks.** Some scammers try to file false information on your behalf. Before you sign any form or document, make sure it is fully and accurately filled out. Don't let anyone convince you to lie on a form or sign a blank form. Never sign anything unless you understand what it says.
- **Keep your original documents in a safe place.** Don't give your original documents to anyone unless you see proof that the government requires the original document. If you give someone an original, they may lose it or refuse to return it unless you pay them.
- **Keep copies of all documents related to your immigration matter.** Get and keep copies of all immigration documents you submit to USCIS, as well as all communications and correspondence with the government and any person or organization helping you.
- **Be wary of telephone and email scams.** Do not give money or personal information to anyone who calls, texts, or emails you claiming that there is a problem with your immigration matter. No government agency will ask for payment or your personal information by phone, email, or text.

RESOURCES

- For lists of nonprofit organizations that provide free immigration help to low-income individuals, visit the following:
 - o U.S. Department of Justice:
 - justice.gov/eoir/list-pro-bono-legal-service-providers (legal services providers)
 - justice.gov/eoir/recognized-organizations-and-accredited-representatives-roster-state-and-city (accredited representatives)
 - o Law Help CA: lawhelpca.org
 - o Immigration Law Help: immigrationlawhelp.org
 - o California Department of Social Services: cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/immigration/contractor-contact-information
- If you are the victim of an immigration scam:
 - o Get help from a legitimate legal aid organization: lawhelpca.org.
 - o Contact the U.S. Department of Justice's Fraud Abuse Prevention Program: EOIR.Fraud.Program@usdoj.gov or (703) 305-0470
 - o Report the scam to the Federal Trade Commission: reportfraud.ftc.gov
 - o Report the scam to the California Attorney General's Office: oag.ca.gov/report
- Learn more about immigration scams: uscis.gov/avoid-scams