



The State Bar of California

Fraud Alert: How to Avoid Legal Fraud In Wake Of Immigration Raid Warnings

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The State Bar of California is warning the public, and immigrant communities in particular, to watch out for and report potential fraud in response to reports of immigration raids in the northern part of the state. As a result of warnings that the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement may take action across much of the state, uncertainty faced by Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, and ongoing issues facing immigrants, many people may wish to seek legal advice about immigration law.

The State Bar advises Californians to avoid fraud from attorneys, notarios or other unlicensed legal providers by taking some of the following steps:

- Ask for the attorney's State Bar number. Look them up on the State Bar website (www.calbar.ca.gov) to see if their license is active and whether they have any history of discipline. Consumers can also call the State Bar at 800-843-9053.
- Be wary of those who call themselves notarios – this is not authorized in California.
- Make sure to get your contract in writing as well as receipts for payments you make.
- Be wary if someone requires cash payments.
- Keep a paper trail. If you don't have a bank account, use a cashier's check. If you've already made a payment, you are entitled to ask for an accounting of your bills.

California law prohibits lawyers or others acting on the behalf of a lawyer from:

- Promising a particular outcome from the legal representation
- Lying about their ability to represent you in immigration court or act as your lawyer
- Seeking clients by mail unless the letter and envelope are clearly labeled as an advertisement

If someone hires an immigration consultant rather than an attorney, it's important to understand what an immigration consultant can and cannot do. Immigration consultants can help consumers fill out paperwork and translate and submit forms to government agencies, but they cannot give legal advice and cannot represent anyone in Immigration Court. Attorneys or accredited representatives must be registered with the Executive Office of Immigration Review before appearing in Immigration Court. Immigration lawyers can be licensed in other states even if they practice immigration law in California. Still, any complaints about such attorneys will be forwarded to the correct state authorities.

Additional information

- [Complaint form to report unauthorized practice of law](#) in English, Spanish, additional languages
- [Complaint form to report attorney misconduct](#) in English, Spanish, additional languages
- [Legal aid organizations in California](#)
- [Legal resources for immigrants](#)
- [More information about immigration consultants or notarios](#)

The State Bar, which regulates the practice of law in California, cannot represent clients or refer them to a particular attorney. People needing a lawyer can contact the State Bar of California to connect with a certified lawyer referral service at 415-538-2250 or email LRS@calbar.ca.gov.