If someone gives legal advice without a license, that is called the unauthorized practice of law (UPL). In California, only attorneys can give legal advice. If an attorney loses their license to practice, but continues to take and advise clients, that is also considered the unauthorized practice of law.

There is no cost to file a complaint. You can file a complaint regardless of citizenship, residence, or immigration status. The State Bar does not ask for or track immigration or citizenship status.

Questions?
Call the State Bar's multilingual complaint hotline: 800-843-9053

Have You Been a Victim of Non-Attorney or Notario Fraud?

The State Bar of California
COMPLAINT FORMS

The State Bar offers unauthorized practice of law complaint forms in multiple languages.

For questions, call the State Bar’s multilingual complaint hotline at 800-843-9053. The forms are also available online at (www.calbar.ca.gov).

Here are some situations where you may want to file a complaint:

- You have consulted someone about immigration who pretends to be a lawyer, but the person does not hold a license. Immigration consultants can give only non-legal help, such as translating answers on forms. They cannot suggest answers or advise you on which forms to fill out.

- You have hired an attorney who says they can practice in California, but only holds a license in another state. Please keep in mind that in some instances attorneys who are properly licensed and in good standing in another state may practice immigration law in California.

- You discover that the attorney you hired worked on your case while their license was suspended by the State Bar.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY

Ask the person to provide you information of where they are licensed to practice law and to give you their bar number. Look them up on the State Bar’s website (www.calbar.ca.gov) or call the State Bar at 800-843-9053.

Make sure to get your contract in writing as well as receipts for payments you make.

If you have already made a payment, you are entitled to ask for an accounting of your bills.

Be wary of those who call themselves notarios – this is not authorized in California. The law also requires non-lawyer immigration consultants to register with the Secretary of State and file a bond of $100,000. A person who is not licensed to practice law cannot call themselves Notarios. Notarios are not attorneys and cannot provide legal advice.

Keep a paper trail. If you don’t have a bank account, use a cashier’s check.

Be wary if someone requires cash payments.