



# IMMIGRATION SERVICES

Immigration law is one of the most complicated areas in the legal field. Thousands of Washington consumers require immigration-related legal services each year, but more and more people are being defrauded by people claiming to be experts. The consequences can be devastating for those seeking the opportunity to live and work in the United States.

Missing a deadline or not properly researching applicable law prior to submitting an application can cause an immigrant to lose their legal status or even face deportation.

## LOCATING LEGITIMATE SERVICES

To find a licensed attorney or federally authorized professional who specializes in immigration law, contact these organizations for information:

- American Association of Immigration Lawyers -Washington Chapter: [www.ailawa.org](http://www.ailawa.org)
- Latino Bar Association of Washington (LBAW): [www.lbaw.org](http://www.lbaw.org)
- Washington State Bar Association: [www.wsba.org](http://www.wsba.org)
- The Northwest Immigrant Rights Project provides legal services to immigrants and refugees and offers workshops for those who want to know if they are qualified to petition for their family members to get legal status in the U.S. Information is available online at [www.nwirp.org](http://www.nwirp.org). Western Washington residents may call 800-445-5771 or 206-587-4009. In Eastern Washington, call 888-756-3641. Calls are answered on weekdays; ask for the Citizenship Unit.
- Your county bar association

## CHECKING CREDENTIALS

Make sure anyone who submits an immigration petition on your behalf is authorized to provide immigration-related services before you pay any money or turn over personal information.

- If a person claims to be a lawyer, ask to see his or her bar license. A real lawyer would not be offended by this request.
- Conduct a “lawyer search” on the Washington State Bar Association’s website at [www.wsba.org](http://www.wsba.org) to see if a person is licensed to practice law in Washington.
- If a person is licensed to practice law in another state, make sure to check that state’s registry of licensed attorneys.
- To check if a person or organization is authorized under federal law to provide immigration services, search [www.justice.gov/eoir](http://www.justice.gov/eoir).

Do not trust other so-called “immigration assistants” and “immigration consultants” with legal matters. Such individuals may claim to be intimately familiar with immigration law, but they are not authorized to provide legal advice or assist others in preparing documents related to an immigration matter. And they haven’t received any sort of specialized training to prepare them to advise others in immigration cases.

While these individuals may claim to be a less-expensive alternative to a lawyer, having an unskilled practitioner advise you on the complicated aspects of immigration can cost you dearly in the end. You may have to hire a lawyer later to undo the mess the “immigration assistant” caused in the first place.

## REPORTING FRAUD

Report immigration scams to the Federal Trade Commission at [www.ftc.gov/immigration](http://www.ftc.gov/immigration).

The Washington Attorney General’s Consumer Resource Center accepts complaints about immigration scams and the unauthorized practice law. Victims may file a complaint online at [www.atg.wa.gov](http://www.atg.wa.gov) or call 1-800-551-4636 between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. weekdays. Written complaints can be filed in Spanish at <http://atg.wa.gov/EnEspañol.aspx>. A brochure is also available in Chinese.





## STATE LAW

Washington state law protects consumers from immigration-related fraud. The recently enacted Immigration Services Fraud Prevention Act prohibits anyone from engaging in the unauthorized practice of law in an immigration matter, unless that person is a licensed attorney or is otherwise authorized to provide legal services under federal immigration law. The new law goes into effect on Oct. 20, 2011.

The new law, which is designed to protect consumers from the deceptive business practices, prohibits non-lawyers and unauthorized individuals from engaging in several other activities, such as

- Selecting or assisting another in selecting an immigration-related government form;
- Advising another as to his or her answers on an immigration-related government form;
- Soliciting to prepare documents for another for submission in a judicial or administrative immigration proceeding;
- Charging a fee for referring another to a person licensed to practice law;
- Drafting or completing legal documents affecting the rights of another in an immigration matter;
- Referring to oneself as an “immigration assistant,” “immigration consultant,” “immigration specialist,” or any other term in any language (including the Spanish term *notario publico*), that conveys or implies that the person possesses professional legal skills in the area of immigration law;

While the law does not prohibit the provision of translation services, the law does prohibit non-lawyers and other unauthorized persons from advising customers as to their answers on immigration forms.

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Federal Trade Commission education materials in English, Spanish, Chinese and Korean explain how to avoid and report immigration services fraud, and how to find legitimate no-cost or low-cost immigration advice from authorized providers. [www.ftc.gov/immigration](http://www.ftc.gov/immigration) for more information or to report scams.
  - UCSIS provides materials in English and 13 other languages at [www.uscis.gov/avoidscams](http://www.uscis.gov/avoidscams). Resources are also available at [www.uscis.gov/citizenship](http://www.uscis.gov/citizenship).
  - Free information for immigrants and refugees can be found online at [www.washingtonlawhelp.org](http://www.washingtonlawhelp.org).
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## DON'T BE DECEIVED BY A NOTARIO PÚBLICO!

In Washington and around the country, people advertising immigration services use the title *notario público* on business cards and in their business dealings to deceive consumers into thinking that they have special legal training in immigration affairs. However, a *notario público* is not a lawyer and is not authorized under state or federal law to provide you with legal assistance in your immigration case.

In several Latin American countries, the term *notario público* refers to an individual who has received extensive legal training over the course of several years.

In the United States, a “notary public” is an individual who has the authority to administer an oath or affirmation or witness the signing of papers. The title is relatively simple to obtain.

Many people use this linguistic accident to deceive Spanish-speaking customers into thinking that they are experts in immigration law. Don't be deceived by a person described as a *notario* or *notario público*. He or she is probably just a “notary public” with no legal skills whatsoever.

For more information about *notarios* and their illegal tactics, including information on how to spot a fraudulent immigration services provider, visit the American Immigration Lawyers Association's website at [www.stopnotariofraud.com](http://www.stopnotariofraud.com).

**Only licensed attorneys and federally authorized practitioners can provide legal advice on immigration matters**