

**NEW LAW PROTECTS IMMIGRANTS FROM UNSCRUPULOUS SERVICE PROVIDERS
AND SCAMS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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***DCA Conducting Routine Inspections Citywide and Encourages Immigrants to File
Complaints***

The New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) is reminding immigrants and immigrant service businesses that a new law outlining rules for fee-based immigration service providers has taken effect. The DCA is enforcing this new law through routine patrol inspections in all five boroughs, and encourages anyone wishing to file a complaint to call 311, the City's 24-hour hotline, or online (in English and Spanish) at www.nyc.gov/consumers. Complaints can be filed anonymously, and with the assistance of 311 operators with access to approximately 170 languages.

Under Local Law 31, any person or business that offers immigrant assistance services* within New York City must do the following.

- Maintain a \$50,000 surety bond.
- Provide a written contract that itemizes all services, and that lists all fees and costs to be charged for services. Contract must be written in the language understood by consumers. If other than English, an English version must also be provided.
- Post signs and disclaimers in advertising stating the provider is not an attorney or accredited by the Board of Immigration Appeals, and that providers may not give legal advice. Signs must be conspicuously posted and in all languages in which services are provided at the location.
- Retain for three years, copies of all documents prepared or obtained for the customer.
- Allow consumers to cancel any contract within three days and receive a full refund.

*Attorneys, not-for-profit organizations, federally accredited immigration service providers, elected officials, and government employees are exempt.

Under Local Law 31, immigrant service providers subject to this law cannot:

- Charge fees to provide, distribute, or submit official government documents/forms.
- Charge fees for services not performed.
- Fail to provide consumer with copies of documents filed or sent on behalf of consumer; or refuse to return original documents.
- Advertise legal services or give legal advice concerning an immigration matter.
- Imply that they have special influence with government entities, or make guarantees unless there is a basis of fact and it is in writing.
- Disclose any information to immigration authorities without knowledge or consent of the consumer.

Violators face penalties including maximum fines of \$2,500 for the first offense, and \$5,000 for each offense thereafter.

Visit the Department of Consumer Affairs' web site at www.nyc.gov/consumers