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**NYC DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND MAYOR'S OFFICE OF IMMIGRANT AFFAIRS  
JOIN THE DEPARTMENTS OF HOMELAND SECURITY AND JUSTICE ALONG WITH THE  
FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION TO ANNOUNCE MULTI-AGENCY EFFORT TO COMBAT  
IMMIGRATION SERVICE SCAMS**

***Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) Announces Vigorous Enforcement Efforts to Protect  
Immigrants from Immigration Service Providers who Break Local Laws***

***DCA Conducted More Than 280 Investigations of Immigration Service Providers in Two Years***

NYC Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) Commissioner Jonathan Mintz and Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs Commissioner Fatima Shama joined the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and Justice (DOJ) along with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to announce a nationwide initiative to combat Immigration Services Scams. As part of today's initiative DCA announced recent enforcement efforts to protect immigrants from immigration service providers who break the law. Immigrant service providers are authorized to only offer clerical services and must follow local laws that prevent them from falsely claiming to be able to provide legal services and from using contracts that don't clearly define the contract requirements that ensure consumers know precisely what services are being provided. Since 2009, DCA conducted 280 inspections of 224 immigration service providers who charge fees for performing any immigration-related service and are not attorneys. As a result of these investigations, DCA issued 134 violations with \$288,268 in fines. The most common violations were failing to have a contract or having a contract that did not include all required information, failing to post required disclosures and failing to maintain the required surety bond.

The City of New York joined "Combating Immigration Services Scams," a multi-agency initiative of the Federal Trade Commission, the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Division and Executive Office for Immigration Review, the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 16 state attorneys generals and a number of city and county law enforcement authorities from across the country to announce an initiative to combat immigrant service scams. The initiative was announced in Washington, D.C. followed by local announcements in New York City, San Antonio, Baltimore, Atlanta, Detroit, Los Angeles, Fresno and Seattle.

"When immigrants are taken advantage of by immigration service providers, their dreams of becoming American citizens are put at risk," said DCA Commissioner Jonathan Mintz. "In too many cases, immigrants harmed by these providers are afraid to come forward to ask our agency for help in getting the protections to which they are entitled by law. In New York City, for example, it is illegal to provide legal assistance without a license to practice law, to use deceptive advertisements that imply that these services can be provided or to fail to provide a contract that clearly defines these services. To help fulfill Mayor Bloomberg's promise to protect the City's immigrant population, we are vigorously enforcing the law and partnering with our colleagues in government and community organizations to help educate those seeking immigration assistance."

"Too often immigrant New Yorkers hoping to realize their American dreams fall victim to unscrupulous immigrant services providers who only make matters worse," said Immigrant Affairs Commissioner Fatima Shama. "We are shining a national spotlight on these unlawful providers and will continue working with our partners to ensure that providers who break our laws are held accountable. Our City is committed to protecting New Yorkers from fraud and providing access to professionals that provide legitimate immigration legal services."

Local New York City laws encompass providing advice concerning an immigration matters and advertising legal services. The law requires immigrant service providers to provide a written contract, written in the language understood by the consumer, which itemizes all services and lists all fees to be charged for services. They must also post signs and disclaimers in advertising stating the provider is not an attorney or accredited by the Board of Immigration Appeals and that they may not give legal advice. They must also maintain a \$50,000 surety bond and allow consumers to cancel any contract within three days and receive a full refund. Immigrant service providers cannot charge fees to provide, distribute or submit official government documents or forms or charge fees for services not performed. They also cannot advertise or disclose any information to immigration authorities without the knowledge or consent of the consumer.

In some Spanish-speaking countries, a *notario público* is trained legal advisor but in the United States, a notary public is not. In the U.S., a notary public is a public officer and is only authorized to notarize documents and administer and certify an oath in which you swear to the truth of statements made on a document. In New York State, a notary public may not give legal advice, draft legal papers or review documents for legality.

In addition to cracking down on unlawful immigrant services providers, the City is also working to ensure immigrants have access to lawful legal services. The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, in conjunction with the Department of Youth and Community Development, requires that organizations receiving city funding to provide immigration legal services are accredited by the Board of Immigration Appeals to protect New Yorkers from the unlawful practice of immigration law. The City also works with the City University of New York, the Legal Aid Society, the American Immigration Lawyers Association, and the New York City Bar Association to offer free or low cost immigration services at events such as legal clinics for Haitian immigrants during the Temporary Protected Status registration periods.

For more information about what an immigration service provider can and cannot do in New York City, download DCA's [Immigration Service Provider Consumer Guide](#), which includes a model contract, from [nyc.gov/consumers](http://nyc.gov/consumers). The guide includes information in English, Spanish, Bengali, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Korean and Russian. You can file an immigration service provider complaint online or by calling 311 (212-NEW-YORK). You can file a complaint anonymously using 311. Operators have access to approximately 170 languages. Additional resources are available through the USCIS at [uscis.gov/avoidscams](http://uscis.gov/avoidscams).

The "Combating Immigration Services Scams" initiative announced 69 law enforcement actions (16 federal, 44 state, and 9 local) and additional local administrative actions against immigration service providers, new consumer education efforts in multiple languages, and increased cooperation among initiative partners. Federal authorities will be using the FTC's online Consumer Sentinel complaint database to share immigration services complaints that will assist initiative partners in bringing additional enforcement actions in the future.

DCA enforces the Consumer Protection Law and other related business laws throughout New York City. Empowering consumers and businesses to ensure a fair and vibrant marketplace, DCA licenses more than 78,000 businesses in 55 different industries. Through targeted outreach, partnerships with community and trade organizations, and informational materials, DCA educates consumers and businesses alike about their rights and responsibilities. DCA's Office of Financial Empowerment (OFE) is the first local government initiative in the nation with a mission to educate, empower, and protect New Yorkers with low incomes so they can build assets and make the most of their financial resources. Toward that end, OFE seeks to increase access to high-quality, low-cost financial education and counseling; improve access to income-boosting tax credits; connect households to safe and affordable banking and asset-building products and services; and enforce and improve consumer protections to enhance financial stability. For more information, call 311 or visit DCA online at [nyc.gov/consumers](http://nyc.gov/consumers). Follow us on [Twitter](#) and find us on [Facebook](#).

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## Tips for Consumers Using an Immigration Service Providers (ISPs)

These tips are also available in Spanish, Bengali, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Korean and Russian at [nyc.gov/consumers](https://nyc.gov/consumers).

### ISPs are NOT qualified to:

- Tell you how to file for a particular immigration status
- Advise you on your chances of getting a particular immigration status
- Help you prepare for immigration interviews

*Note: A notario público, or notary public, is not an attorney and cannot offer the services above.*

### Only use an ISP to:

- Translate and notarize documents
- Help you gather documents (like a birth certificate or school records)
- Prepare and complete application forms (but not to advise you on your answers)
- Arrange for photographs or medical tests
- Take English language or civics classes

### Before you go to an ISP

Talk to a reputable lawyer about your situation. Or try a reputable nonprofit organization; many have lawyers on staff or are recognized by the Board of Immigration Appeals so they can represent you in immigration proceedings. Know which forms you need to file before you walk in the ISP's door.

### Protect Yourself:

- Only go to ISPs that have physical locations. Never use one you can reach only by phone or email.
- Do not believe any ISP that claims to have special influence with immigration authorities.
- ISPs must sign a written contract with you before providing services. Read the contract before signing it and keep a copy for your records.
- Do not leave your original documents (like a marriage certificate) with an ISP. Give copies instead.
- Avoid paying in advance for service. Pay only after the ISP has finished the work.
- Get a written receipt. Make sure the receipt contains the name and address of the ISP.
- Do not sign any blank or incomplete forms, and insist that the ISP sign any form it prepares for you.
- Make sure the ISP has a bond, contract of indemnity, or letter of credit. Write down the name and contact information of the bond company or bank. If the ISP does not give you a refund it owes you or harms you in another way, you can file a claim. If the ISP does not have a bond or will not give you its bond information, use another business.

**For information on free or low-cost immigration advice or help**, call the 311. **For an attorney referral**, call the New York City Bar Association at (212) 626-7373. You can find all immigration forms on the [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website](https://uscis.gov).