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**MAYOR DE BLASIO AND A.G. SCHNEIDERMAN ANNOUNCE JOINT TASK FORCE TO  
COMBAT IMMIGRATION SERVICES FRAUD**

*Coordinated Enforcement Effort Will Hold Fraudsters Accountable and Encourage Victims to Come Forward*

*Part of Nationwide Effort to Support President Obama's Immigration Reform by Combatting Those Who Take Advantage of Vulnerable Immigrants*

**NEW YORK** – Mayor Bill de Blasio and Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman today announced the formation of a new joint task force to target those who prey on immigrants, while encouraging victims of fraud to come forward without fear.

The task force, led by the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs and the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs, together with the Office of the Attorney General, will dedicate enforcement resources and conduct a public awareness campaign to stop predators from taking advantage of immigrant communities in advance of the full implementation of President Obama's executive actions on immigration.

"The president's immigration reforms will initiate an economic, political and social transformation of our cities and our country, but unfortunately, this progress also brings new opportunities for criminals who prey on the most vulnerable among us," said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. "Our joint City-State anti-fraud task force will stop fraudsters in their tracks and provide a safe place for immigrant fraud victims to come forward. While New York is taking bold action, we are also working in collaboration with cities and states across the country to prevent fraud and protect families nationwide."

"Together we are sending a powerful message that New York has zero tolerance for anyone who seeks to prey on immigrants and their families," said **Attorney General Schneiderman**. "As the president's executive action goes into effect, New York is taking the lead to root out fraud against those looking for a better life. Through this strategic partnership, we will hold accountable those who take advantage of vulnerable immigrants and help make the goals of the president's action a reality for thousands of New Yorkers."

"The president's bold action gives thousands of New Yorkers a path toward security and stability, but that promise can be threatened by fraudsters looking to profit from immigrant vulnerability," said **Immigrant Affairs Commissioner Nisha Agarwal**. "Immigrants should be careful to avoid fraud by going to high-quality trusted services, including those supported by the city. By committing the resources of our city and state agencies as part of this task force, New York is taking a leading role to ensure the new process is enacted with integrity."

"Too many immigrant New Yorkers have been victims of predatory immigration service providers who fleece consumers of thousands of dollars while failing to provide bona fide services. These providers often leave

immigrants more vulnerable than they were before,” said **Department of Consumer Affairs Commissioner Julie Menin**. “Mayor de Blasio has committed to protecting all of New York City’s immigrants, and DCA is proud to be partnering with the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs and New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman to engage in public outreach and appropriate enforcement actions to ensure that our City’s immigrants are protected.”

The joint task force will focus on rooting out a variety of abuses targeting immigrants, but particularly the unauthorized practice of law, commonly known as “notario fraud” or “immigrant service provider fraud.”

New York State’s Immigration Assistance Service Enforcement Act establishes protections for immigrants who use the services of individuals or businesses that falsely represent themselves as certified legal advisors for citizenship and other issues. The law, which went into effect on February 6, 2015, stiffens penalties and adds new penalties, both criminal and civil, for violations of the Act.

The president’s recent executive action will lead many immigrants to search for legal assistance to navigate the new rules, potentially creating an opportunity for service providers or scam artists to take advantage of immigrants. Unauthorized immigration consultants can create delays in the application process, cost applicants unnecessary fees and possibly even lead to removal proceedings.

The task force is committed to undertaking the following actions:

- Targeted enforcement and/or investigations against immigrant service providers who may be engaging in the unauthorized practice of law. These investigations could occur in partnership, where feasible, or independently by each agency.
- Improved information-sharing to identify illegal activity and coordinate enforcement efforts. In collaboration with community organizations, the task force will establish an information pipeline to connect on-the-ground reports of immigration fraud hotspots to City agencies and the Attorney General’s Office to stop problematic service providers or practices.
- Increased public awareness outreach to engage vulnerable communities and encourage victims to come forward. City agencies and the Attorney General’s Office will collaborate on public education campaigns to bring attention to potential abuses wherever they exist.
- Continual expansion to include other relevant governmental entities and provide a blueprint for cities and states across the country to adopt best practices. As part of Cities United for Immigration Action, New York City is working in close collaboration with partner cities to develop a national model to combat immigration services fraud.

The de Blasio administration has a proven track record for welcoming immigrant New Yorkers. From access to federal immigration benefits, citizenship and U-visa application assistance, to the City’s response to the unaccompanied child migrant crisis and new Immigration and Customs Enforcement detainer legislation to dramatically reduce deportations, New York City has led a movement that cements the notion that a city’s prosperity and strength depends upon its new American residents having ample opportunities to reach their fullest potential and contribute to the well-being of our communities.

Attorney General Schneiderman has a strong track record for combatting immigration services fraud and other actions that ensure equal opportunity for immigrant communities. Recent examples of actions taken by his Civil Rights Bureau include the establishment of a \$2.2 million restitution fund for victims of one of the nation’s largest immigration services schemes, action to combat fraud perpetrated by employment agencies that target

vulnerable immigrant communities, and efforts to ensure equal educational opportunity for unaccompanied minors and undocumented youth regardless of immigration status.

On April 12, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs will co-host an executive action legal screening for immigrant New Yorkers who might be eligible for the DACA/DAPA programs. While implementation of these programs is temporarily on hold, providing reliable information and combatting abuse is more important than ever. This legal screening event will mark an important citywide collaboration between the city's largest legal service providers and immigration advocacy groups to create a large-scale legal clinic.

The event will be held on April 12th, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Temple Emanu-El, located at 1 East 65th Street, Manhattan. For more information: [nyc.gov/deferredaction](http://nyc.gov/deferredaction).

"I am proud to be part of a coalition to protect some of our most vulnerable constituents," said **Councilmember Rafael Espinal, Chair of the Consumer Affairs Committee**. "At a time when President's Barack Obama's executive order will bring millions of undocumented immigrants out of the shadows, we must ensure that we shine light on the service providers who are out to scam them out of their money. I've witnessed the loss endured by immigrants that have fallen victim to shady legal service providers. They have lost thousands of hard earned dollars to receive advice from individuals claiming to be lawyers for services they could have otherwise gotten for free."

"For too long, scam artists have taken advantage of the vulnerability of new immigrants," said **Assemblyman Francisco Moya**. "This new anti-fraud task force sends a strong message that New York is prepared for the President's immigration reforms and that we will not tolerate immigration-related fraud. As a lawmaker who has spent many years advocating for anti-fraud measures that protect new immigrants from predatory employment agencies, I am intimately aware of how fraudsters seek to exploit immigrants. I commend Mayor Bill de Blasio and Attorney General Eric Schneiderman for taking this innovative and pro-active approach to combating fraud. This initiative helps demonstrate that New York is a welcome home for immigrants."

"Immigrants across New York will welcome this new Task Force as a much-needed effort to bring new energy to this issue throughout New York City and State," said **Javier H. Valdés, co-Executive Director of Make the Road New York**. "As New Yorkers prepare for the administrative relief that President Obama announced last November, it's critical that New York steps up its enforcement of unscrupulous notarios who take advantage of our communities. Make the Road New York applauds the Mayor and Attorney General for this new effort, and we are eager to work with the Task Force to ensure its success."

"For organizations like La Fuente, the fight against fraudulent legal service providers who target immigrants aspiring to legal status has been daunting," said **Lucia Gomez, Executive Director, La Fuente**. "The announcement that Mayor de Blasio and State Attorney General Schneiderman will launch a joint Anti-Immigration Fraud Task Force demonstrates a commitment to addressing head-on an issue that has plagued our immigrant communities for decades. This laudable effort will provide immigrant communities across the state a more robust effort to ensure predators are reported and dealt with by the proper authorities. With this announcement, New York has once again demonstrated its commitment to advancing immigrant rights and recognizing the value of its diverse population."

"New York City truly stands as example of inclusion for our immigrant residents, yet too often newly arrived New Yorkers stay in the shadows despite being victims of fraud that threaten their well-being and financial stability," said **Grace Bonilla, President for The Committee for Hispanic Children and Families**. "CHCF whole heartedly supports and congratulates Mayor de Blasio and Attorney General Schneiderman for addressing these injustices and providing communities that give so much to this city an avenue to come forward, stop these abuses and advocate for themselves."

“We applaud Mayor de Blasio and Attorney General Schneiderman for their bold leadership in protecting immigrants from fraudulent actors, by the creation of this very important task force. We at Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights have seen the life-shattering damage that unscrupulous immigration providers have wreaked on our community members,” said **Angela Fernandez, Esq., Executive Director of Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights**. “We look forward to working closely with the task force on behalf of all immigrants throughout New York State.”

"Without any pity for those who desperately seek the safety of legal residency for themselves and their families, agents of exploitation have for too long reigned with impunity,” said **Luis Garden Acosta, Founder and President of El Puente**. “We welcome Mayor De Blasio's defense of our community's defenseless and join with our Attorney General and President Obama in declaring, once and for all, Basta Ya!"

"We are pleased to hear about the creation of an agency task force to address the issue of immigration services fraud," said **Steve Choi, executive director of the New York Immigration Coalition**. "We look forward to continuing this great work together, and believe that only with continued collaboration will we make meaningful headway against notarios and other unscrupulous providers."

To report complaints regarding immigration services, contact the Attorney General’s Immigration Services Fraud Unit Hotline at (866) 390-2992 or [Civil.Rights@ag.ny.gov](mailto:Civil.Rights@ag.ny.gov).

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