

5 Tips to Help You Avoid Immigration Scams

Do you need help figuring out the immigration process or filling out immigration forms? Whether you're renewing a Green Card, becoming a citizen, or filling out forms, it's important to get the right help and avoid people who just want to take your money and may hurt your case.

1. Don't go to a notario, notario público, or "immigration consultants" for legal advice.

These are usually dishonest people who say they have a special relationship with the government, or guarantee to get you results. In the U.S., notarios are not lawyers: they are not authorized to give you legal advice or talk to government agencies for you.

2. Only a lawyer or a Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) accredited representative can give you legal advice.

Lawyers can give you advice and represent you. Before selecting a lawyer, make sure he or she has experience with immigration cases and find out if he or she has been disciplined or suspended for breaking the rules for lawyers. To find out about Maryland lawyers, call the Client Protection Fund at 410-260-3635. To find a lawyer who works in immigration, visit the American Immigration Lawyers Association's website at www.aialawyer.com. These lawyers may charge a fee to help you. To find an immigration lawyer who doesn't charge or who charges low fees go to: www.adminrelief.org/legalhelp/.

BIA accredited representatives are not lawyers, but are authorized by the government to give legal immigration advice, and represent you. They must work for an officially recognized, non-profit organization and may charge a small fee. To find an accredited representative go to: www.justice.gov/eoir/ra/raoster.htm.

When using the services of a lawyer or BIA accredited representative, be sure you review and understand the legal services agreement or contract for services before signing it. The agreement should list the services that will be provided and the fees for each.

3. Never pay for blank government forms. U.S. government immigration forms are free. While you may have to pay a fee to file an immigration form, you can get the blank forms at no cost at www.uscis.gov/forms, by calling USCIS at 1-800-870-3676, or by visiting your local USCIS office. Beware of websites that imitate government websites! Government sites end in ".gov" not ".com or .net."

4. Never sign a form before it has been filled out. And, don't sign a form or document if it contains false information or if you don't understand it.

5. Keep copies. Keep a copy of every form that you submit and every letter you get from the government about your application. Keep the receipt you get from USCIS to prove that it was filed. You'll also need the receipt to check on the status of your application. Never let anyone else keep your original documents, like your birth certificate or passport. Scammers may demand payment to get them back.

Help Others by Reporting Scams. Immigration scams are illegal. If you or someone you know has seen an immigration scam or been the victim of one, contact the Howard County Office of Consumer Protection..

**For assistance with this or other consumer problems,
or to obtain this factsheet in an alternative format contact:**

Howard County Office of Consumer Protection

410-313-6420

consumer@howardcountymd.gov.

Or, visit our website at www.howardcountymd/consumer.

