

Be Aware that Criminals and Scammers Target Immigrants!



Scammers often go after certain groups of people to steal money from them. Immigrants in the U.S. are one of these groups and may lose money when they look for help with their immigration paperwork if they are not careful. These scammers not only run away with your money but they can also harm your chances of immigrating by not filling out the right forms, failing to tell you about court dates, making you miss important deadlines, or giving you wrong legal advice. This publication explains how to identify and avoid scammers and what to do if you have been scammed.

Criminals pretending to be lawyers

Sadly, people take advantage of people who need immigration attorneys and pretend to be a lawyer online just to steal money. In the U.S., if someone reaches out to you from a TikTok account, or through other platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook, claiming to be an immigration lawyer, the account is most likely a fraudulent or scam account. It is against Minnesota law for a lawyer to contact you directly to offer legal services, unless the services they are offering are free.

Other signs that someone is not a lawyer and is lying to steal your money include: threatening you with deportation if you do not pay them, rushing you to make a payment, or requiring that you make a payment with a gift card.

Another warning that someone is lying to you is if they advertise a price for immigration services that is much lower than most immigration lawyers—if it is too good to be true, it is probably a scam!

If someone says they are a lawyer, ask which state they have a law license in. Then, contact the state bar association to make sure they are allowed to work in that state. If someone claims to be an “accredited representative,” call EOIR at (703) 305-0470 or visit <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/recognized-organizations-and-accredited-representatives-roster-state-and-city> to see if they are allowed to provide immigration paperwork assistance.

Report the crime!

If you believe you have been contacted by a fraudulent TikTok account, you can report the account to TikTok online at support.tiktok.com/en/safety-hc/report-a-problem/report-an-impersonation-account. If you believe you have been contacted by a fraudulent Instagram account, you can report the account to Instagram online at https://help.instagram.com/192435014247952/?helpref=uf_share

If you believe you have been contacted by a fraudulent Facebook account, you can report the account to Facebook online at https://www.facebook.com/help/1380418588640631/?helpref=hc_fnav. You can learn more about protecting yourself from criminals online at uscis.gov/avoid-scams.

If you know the scammer lives in Minnesota, you can report the scam to the Minnesota Attorney General’s Office here: <https://www.ag.state.mn.us/Office/Forms/ConsumerAssistanceRequest.asp>. If you do not know where the scammer lives you can file a complaint online with the Federal Trade Commission at reportfraud.ftc.gov.

“Notarios” Cannot Help You

Only work with a licensed immigration lawyer or accredited representative if you or someone you know needs help with immigration paperwork and skip the notarios. Notarios are



not lawyers and cannot help with immigration. In the U.S., “notaries” are not lawyers and cannot do what a “notario” can do in other countries. The only service notaries are allowed to provide in the U.S. is certify someone’s identity on a document. They cannot give any type of legal advice or file any immigration papers; only a lawyer or an “accredited representative” working for an organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice can give you legal immigration advice. Attorneys and accredited representatives must explain the law and your options, so that you can make important decisions about your case, sign all the papers they prepare, have in writing their services and what you are paying for, keep your information confidential, and update you on important dates. Attorneys should also update you on the progress of your case, give you copies of everything, even if you owe them money, and return your phone calls or emails.

Be aware, and do not sign blank immigration forms, or forms that have false information about you, or your situation. A dishonest notario may ask you to do this. Do not let a notario, or anyone else, keep your original documents or persuade you to provide false information. Giving the government false information can affect your immigration status.

The American Immigration Lawyers Association’s Notario Fraud Project has a list of resources to help victims of notario fraud. For more information about notario fraud visit www.stopnotariofraud.org. If a non-lawyer located in Minnesota sells you legal services you can report it to the Minnesota Attorney General’s Office.

Government Forms – they are free!

You should never pay for government immigration forms from the U.S. government. Government forms are free and can be found by visiting www.uscis.gov/forms/all-forms. Some scammers have websites that look like they are official government sites. You might see a scam website that says “U.S. Immigration” and shows pictures of American flags, or the Statue of Liberty, but you should make sure the website address has “.gov” to be sure it is a real government website. Fake government websites are used to steal your money or your private information—do not fall for them!

Finding an Immigration Attorney

Make sure that anyone who helps you with your immigration case is authorized to help. If you want to find a free, or low-cost immigration attorney, check out justice.gov. Use quotation marks and search for “list pro bono service providers.” You can also look for free or low-cost legal services and authorized immigration service providers at uscis.gov/avoid-scams/find-legal-services.

You can also view a list of immigration attorneys at the American Immigration Lawyers Association by visiting www.aialawyer.com. To make sure an individual is a licensed attorney, in the state of Minnesota, visit the Minnesota Judicial Branch at <https://mars.courts.state.mn.us>. At the end of this flyer is a list of other resources.

Remember!!!

Always:

- ✓ Get immigration information from the U.S. government, starting with uscis.gov or state.gov.
- ✓ Check that the person who helps you is an attorney or accredited representative.
- ✓ Get a receipt if you pay someone to help you.
- ✓ Get copies of forms prepared for you.
- ✓ Keep all letters and notices from USCIS in a safe place.
- ✓ Manage your case with self-help tools at uscis.gov/tools.

Never:

- ✗ Pay for immigration forms. You can get forms free at uscis.gov/forms, by calling 1-800-870-3676, or at your local USCIS office.
- ✗ Sign a blank form. Make sure all forms are complete before you sign them.
- ✗ Sign any forms that have false information.
- ✗ Send original documents as evidence to support your application unless USCIS asks for the original.
- ✗ Work with a notario for preparing or filing immigration documents.

Free Immigration and Refugee Legal Resources

Advocates for Human Rights

Advocates for Human Rights helps people find free lawyers to help immigrants seeking asylum, who are survivors of human trafficking, children who came to the U.S. alone, and people being held by ICE.

For more information, call: (612)-341-3302

Immigrant Client Line: (612)-341-9845

Or visit:

<https://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/Home>

International Institute of Minnesota

The Institute delivers services and resources to assist New Americans in the transition to a new life leading to economic self-sufficiency. From language learning and job training to citizenship classes and the celebration of cultural traditions, the Institute offers New Americans a pathway for a strong start to a new life in our community – something we all benefit from.

For more information, call:

(651)-647-0191, then press 2 for Immigration

Or visit:

<https://iimn.org/programs/immigration-and-citizenship/>

Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota (LSS)

LSS is committed to providing all people with the opportunity to live and work in a community with full and abundant lives. LSS offers Immigration Legal Services for a low fee to help refugees, asylees, and other immigrants living in the Twin Cities and St. Cloud complete immigration documents, including:

- Permanent Resident
- Naturalization
- Employment Authorization, and
- Family visa applications.

Free consultation and screening services are available at the Minneapolis office every Tuesday.

For more information, call: (612)-879-5258

Or visit:

<https://www.lssmn.org/services/refugees/services/immigration>

Minnesota Council of Churches - Refugee Services

A immigration program welcoming persecuted people from around the world. Provides specialized services for refugees and asylees to assist them on the path to self-sufficiency and support them as they work towards achieving their dreams.

For more information, call: (612)-230-3224

Or visit:

<http://mnchurches.webbrohd.com/what-we-do/refugee-services/immigration-legal-services>

Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota (ILCM)

ILCM is a nonprofit agency that provides immigration legal assistance to low-income immigrants and refugees in Minnesota.

For more information, call:

(651)-641-1011 or (800)-223-1368

or visit: www.ilcm.org

Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid (MMLA)

MMLA is a nonprofit agency that provides immigration legal assistance to low-income immigrants and refugees in Minnesota.

For more information, call 1-877-696-6529

or visit mylegalaid.org.

Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS)

SMRLS is a nonprofit agency that provides immigration legal assistance to low-income immigrants and refugees in Minnesota.

For more information, call 1-877-696-6529

or visit smrls.org.



Volunteer Lawyers Network (VLN)

VLN is a nonprofit agency that provides legal assistance to low-income immigrants and refugees in Minnesota. For more information, call (612) 752-6677 or visit vln.org.

Arrive Ministries

Arrive Ministries is a refugee resettlement agency that helps refugees and immigrants find housing, medical care, employment, and immigration legal services.

For more information, call: (612)-798-4332
or visit: <https://arriveministries.org/immigrant-services/>

Additional Publications

The Minnesota Attorney General's Office publishes information on how to protect yourself from common scams and consumer frauds. The publications can be found online at www.ag.state.mn.us/publications. Examples of available publications are:

*Available in Spanish

**Available in Hmong and Somali



How to Spot a Scam



How to Avoid a Scam**



Guarding Your Privacy



Text Message Phishing-or "Smishing"- Scams



Social Media Scams



Migrant Worker Rights*



Deferred Action Policy*



Landlord and Tenants: Rights and Responsibilities*