

# Immigration Scams

## Questions, Answers, and Tips

Unfortunately, lawyers tend to be some of the biggest perpetrators of scams against immigrants. Here are some common questions related to legal services and immigration:



### **ARE NOTARY PUBLICS IN THE U.S. QUALIFIED TO PROVIDE LEGAL SERVICES?**

People who advertise themselves as notary publics are generally not lawyers. In the U.S., most “notary publics” are only qualified to witness signatures, not provide legal services. There are only two kinds of “authorized immigration service providers” who are allowed to provide legal advice on your immigration case and communicate with USCIS or ICE on your behalf: licensed attorneys in good standing, and accredited non-lawyers on the DOJ list of accredited representatives.

### **ONE LAWYER TELLS ME THAT HE HAS PERSONAL CONNECTIONS IN THE U.S. IMMIGRATION SYSTEM. WILL THIS HELP MY CASE?**

Probably not. Personal connections don’t tend to mean much in the U.S. immigration system, even if they do in other countries. The only thing that can help your case is high quality legal representation.



### **I’M AN UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT, AND I NEED A TEMPORARY WORK PERMIT. MY LAWYER SAYS I CAN FILE FOR AN ASYLUM CLAIM TO GET IT– SHOULD I?**

No. There are major penalties attached to filing a frivolous asylum claim, including deportation. In general, filing any official papers when undocumented can lead to discovery by ICE and possible deportation.

### **I NEED AN IMMIGRATION LAWYER NOW. WHERE SHOULD I GO?**

A great place to find good legal services for immigration is the National Immigration Legal Services Directory, where you can search for an immigration lawyer by state, county, or detention center. Fortunately, they only list non-profit organizations that provide low-cost and free legal services. Still, you should always be cautious when seeking legal counsel for a matter as important as your status in the U.S.!



### **DON’T I HAVE A RIGHT TO A GOVERNMENT-APPOINTED LAWYER IN IMMIGRATION COURT?**



Unfortunately not. Unlike U.S. citizens, non-citizen immigrants do not have a constitutional right to legal representation in immigration courts, yet still face federal prosecutors. That means you’ll need to secure your own counsel.



Lawyers, or people pretending to be them, aren't the only immigration scammers. Others might impersonate government agents or falsely threaten an immigrant's legal status in the U.S.– here are some tips that can help you avoid them:

When scammers impersonate a USCIS or ICE official, they contact victims and say that there is a problem with their immigration status. They then offer to “fix” the “problem” for a fee and may threaten deportation or denial of a visa application. These are not real: official government emails will always come from a “.gov” address.

Some scammers might try to contact you and congratulate you for winning a “diversity visa” lottery. They'll likely ask you to send money to process the paperwork. Don't: these emails are fake.

Always be sure you're on the USCIS's official website when seeking immigration forms. Some sites resemble the government's, but aren't. Furthermore, be wary if someone tries to charge you money for an immigration form: they're free!

In general, always be careful what forms you sign (never sign a blank one!) and keep your personal information secure. Immigrants are especially liable to all sorts of scams, and unfortunately, often have fewer means of legal recourse.

**TO ACCESS A LIST OF ACCREDITED IMMIGRATION REPRESENTATIVES, GO HERE:**

[www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/942311/download](http://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/942311/download)

**TO FIND LOW-COST OR FREE LEGAL REPRESENTATION FOR YOUR IMMIGRATION CASE, VISIT**

[www.immigrationadvocates.org/nonprofit/legaldirectory/](http://www.immigrationadvocates.org/nonprofit/legaldirectory/).

**TO ACCESS OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT IMMIGRATION FORMS, VISIT**

<https://www.uscis.gov/forms>.

**FOR GENERAL INFORMATION ON SCAMS AFFECTING IMMIGRANTS, GO TO**

[www.consumer.gov/articles/1017-scams-against-immigrants#!what-to-do](http://www.consumer.gov/articles/1017-scams-against-immigrants#!what-to-do).

