



## I. INTRODUCTION: HOW AND WHERE TO FILE COMPLAINTS AGAINST NOTARIOS AND IMMIGRATION CONSULTANTS

Many noncitizens who would otherwise qualify for immigration benefits discover they will never be successful because an immigration “consultant” destroyed their dreams. *Don't let this happen to you.*

While many legitimate community and religious organizations provide immigration-related services, non-lawyers who advertise as legal “consultants” or “notarios” are not authorized or qualified to help with immigration matters.

It is against the law for “public notaries” or even foreign lawyers who are not licensed in the United States to provide immigration advice—even “just” filling out forms is something that only a licensed, properly trained lawyer or accredited representative should do.

Only a U.S. licensed lawyer or accredited representative is authorized and qualified to assist with your immigration case. Unlike consultants, lawyers have completed extensive education and training before being licensed to represent clients. You can verify whether a lawyer is in good standing and licensed to help you by contacting your state bar association.

Lawyers are also required to maintain high ethical standards—and if they don't, you can contact your local bar association for action. When a consultant promises to help—but doesn't deliver—the damage may not be fixable, and there may be no one to turn to.

### Have You Been Harmed By a Consultant or Notario?

By promising too much—and knowing too little—unauthorized consultants often shatter immigrants' dreams. They will promise low-cost, quick results, but often do not know the law. Even if they actually do the work and file papers, they may do it wrong and cause permanent harm. Furthermore, many are little better than scam artists, taking their client's trust—and money—and never having to answer for the results. If you believe you are a victim of one of these consultants, then this guide will assist you in finding help in your state. You can ask the government to take action against the consultant who harmed you. Your complaint *can* make a difference.

### Using This Guide

This guide contains information, names, telephone numbers and addresses to help consumers take action against predators who have harmed them and their immigration dreams.

### Why is AILA Providing This Guide?

Because we are tired and fed-up seeing the damage these consultants do to immigrant lives and families. We are saddened by the heart-wrenching stories we hear when immigrants come to us *after* the notario or consultant has completely damaged any opportunity the immigrant had to stay in this country and potentially become a citizen. We want to help. Our professional lives are dedicated to it.

If you need a qualified immigration attorney to help with your case, find one fast at [www.ailalawyer.com](http://www.ailalawyer.com).

## How Can You Find Qualified Immigration Assistance?

If you need help finding a qualified immigration attorney in your area, you can contact the American Immigration Lawyers Association toll-free at 1-800-954-0254 or search online at [www.ailalawyer.com](http://www.ailalawyer.com).

An accredited representative works with a nonprofit community or religious organization that has been recognized as having the skill and training to assist people with their immigration matters. You can find a list of accredited representatives at [www.usdoj.gov/eoir/statspub/raroster.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/eoir/statspub/raroster.htm).

Don't be fooled! If you consult a lawyer, make sure the lawyer is licensed. If you work with an accredited representative, ask to see the accreditation.

## Can't Afford a Lawyer?

Unfortunately, the government does not provide free lawyers in immigration cases; generally, you must hire your own lawyer or represent yourself. Certain people may qualify for help from an accredited nonprofit organization for a small fee or even free of charge. In some areas, there may even be referrals available for a "pro bono" (free) lawyer. Neither the Department of Homeland Security nor the Immigration Court can provide you with legal advice or representation. For more information on low fee or pro bono help, visit [www.usdoj.gov/eoir/probono/probono.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/eoir/probono/probono.htm).

## What Rights Do Clients Have?

If you work with a lawyer or accredited representative, you have certain rights.

- You have the right to a written STATEMENT or CONTRACT, explaining the scope of representation and fees.
- You have the right to be kept INFORMED about your case status and what has been filed.
- You have the right to a complete COPY of any forms or documents submitted in your case.
- You have the right to an ACCOUNTING of your case, detailing the total costs, as well as receipts for payments.

## Protect Your Family's Dreams. . . if any promise made by the notario sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

*The guide contains information gathered from official government websites of all 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and several U.S. territories. Although AILA has attempted to verify the information contained herein, we cannot guarantee the accuracy of all phone numbers, web addresses, or other information.*

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# South Carolina



## Attorney General Information

Contact: South Carolina Department  
of Consumer Affairs (SCDCA)  
Phone: (803) 734-4200  
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 5757  
3600 Forest Drive  
3rd Floor  
Columbia, South Carolina 29250  
E-mail: [scdca@dca.state.sc.us](mailto:scdca@dca.state.sc.us)  
Website: <http://www.sconsumer.gov>

## Where to File a Complaint:

South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs  
P.O. Box 5757  
3600 Forest Drive  
3rd Floor  
Columbia, South Carolina 29250

## How to File a Complaint:

File your complaint online at: <http://www.sconsumer.gov/dcafc/dcapolicy.htm>

Or download the complaint form, and mail completed form to the address above.

Download the complaint form online at: [http://www.sconsumer.gov/services/complaint\\_form.pdf](http://www.sconsumer.gov/services/complaint_form.pdf)

## Other Important Information:

Ms. Brandolyn Thomas Pinkston is the Administrator of SCDCA

Toll-free phone number in SC: (800) 922-1594

Fax: (803) 734-4286

At each of the satellite locations listed below, the Department provides staff to take complaints, answer questions, and provide educational material. Consumers that have problems should bring documentation with them regarding their particular situation. All satellite offices are staffed between the hours of 10:00 am and 1:00 pm.

**Summerville:** Dorchester County Council Chambers, 500 North Main Street

**Laurens:** Laurens County Public Library, 1017 W. Main Street

**Gaffney:** Cherokee County Public Library, 300 E. Rutledge Avenue

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