

Who Can Help Me with Immigration Matters?

Dishonest immigration consultants and notarios are out there.

They'll take your money.

They'll take your documents.

They'll make all kinds of promises -- a green card, asylum, prosecutorial discretion, special power with immigration authorities.

But, in the end, you'll get nothing. And, you may destroy your rights to any immigration benefit or relief.

SO... Before you decide to get help with immigration matters, and before you pay any money, educate yourself so that you can find the right person to handle your immigration papers.

Who can give me legal advice and help me with my immigration matters?

Two types of individuals can give legal help on immigration matters: (1) licensed attorneys, also known as lawyers and (2) Board of Immigration Appeals Accredited Representatives (BIAARs) who work for Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) approved non-profit groups.

What is an attorney?

In the United States, an attorney is a graduate from law school who received a Juris Doctor (J.D.) degree and passed a state bar exam. In order to practice law in the U.S., the attorney must be a member of a state bar and have a license to practice law.

How can I tell that the person really is a licensed attorney?

Ask the lawyer what state they are licensed in. Call that State Bar Association and make sure the person is a lawyer and allowed to practice law. The website below has a list of the State Bar Associations in the United States. <http://www.abanet.org/barserv/stlobar.html>

What is a BIAAR?

This is a person approved by the BIA to do immigration work. BIAARs have a lot of experience and knowledge about immigration law.

How do I know if the person is a BIAAR of a BIA recognized non-profit organization?

You can go to the website below and view a list of the non-profit groups approved by the BIA and a list of BIAARs. http://www.justice.gov/eoir/statspub/raroster_files/raroster_reps.htm#S

Can immigration consultants and notarios help me fill out my immigration papers?

No, not unless they are attorneys licensed in the United States or are BIAARs. They do not have the right legal training that allows them to tell you how to best truthfully answer the questions on the form. They also do not have enough knowledge to tell you what immigration relief you might qualify for.

What is a notary public in the United States?

A notary public is a special public officer who can verify that the person signing the piece of paper is who they say they are, take affidavits, and administer oaths. A notary public cannot give you legal advice or help you with your papers.

Are there any non-profit groups in South Carolina that have lawyers or BIAARs that can help me with my case?

Yes. Below is a list of them.

Digna Ochoa Center for Immigration Legal Assistance
Columbia
(803) 929-1940

Catholic Charities
Greenville
(864) 242-2233 Ext 204

Catholic Charities
Hilton Head
(843) 785 -2200

Catholic Charities
Mt. Pleasant
(843) 388-0089

Who can I complain to if I tried to get legal help, but instead just had my money taken?

To complain about a lawyer, call the State Bar where the attorney is licensed. The South Carolina State Bar number is (803) 799-6653.

To complain about a BIAAR, call the BIAAR hotline at 1-800-375-5283.

To complain about anyone else, call the S.C. Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation at (803) 896-4300 or the S.C. Attorney General's Office at (803) 734-3970.

Is there anything else I need to know about getting my legal immigration papers done?

Yes. No matter who does your paperwork, always follow the rules below.

- Never sign any blank forms or papers.
- Do not sign forms or papers when you do not know what they mean.
 - Get someone you trust to read the papers to you.
- Always get copies of your papers.

- Get receipts for any money you pay. Make sure the receipt has the amount paid, the date paid, your name, and the name of the person or business that you paid.

This is not all of the information that you need to know about notarios. Speak to an attorney.

If you do not have a lawyer, the South Carolina Bar Lawyer Referral Service can give you the name of a lawyer who is willing to meet with you and advise you at a lower rate. For the name of a lawyer in your area; call the Lawyer Referral Service (800) 868-2284 statewide or (803) 799-7100 in Columbia.

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To find out more about SCALJC, go to www.scjustice.org on the Internet. This brochure and others can also be found online by going to www.scjustice.org and clicking on 'Brochures.'

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