



# Consumer News

## San Diego City Attorney's Office

Spring 2017

Consumer and Environmental Protection Unit (CEPU)

### In This Issue

If you believe you have been the victim of an immigration scam, or any other scam, the Office of the San Diego City Attorney wants to help you

#### ***FAKE ICE AGENTS***

For more information see this Federal Trade Commission guide to Government Imposter Scams.

#### ***PUBLIC NOTARIES***

For more information on notarios see our "Immigration Fraud and Scam" Newsletter.

#### ***WINNING THE VISA LOTTERY***

For more information on Diversity Visa Lottery Scams please see this State department guide.

#### ***SCAMS TARGETING STUDENTS***

See the "Job Offers" section of this USCIS scam guide for more information.

#### ***JOB OFFERS***

See our "Job Scams" newsletter for more information on job scams. For help avoiding immigration scams please see this USCIS guide.

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### TOP IMMIGRATION SCAMS IN SAN DIEGO

Scams this month in San Diego are targeting students, jobs, and especially the immigrant community. According to the local office of the [Better Business Bureau](#) (BBB), here are the top immigration scams this month in San Diego.

***FAKE ICE AGENTS*** - Scammers posing as immigration officials have tried to extort money from undocumented immigrants by demanding payment or threatening to immediately deport the victim. Scammers have been seen wearing fake Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) jackets (see "Recent Scam Stories" below). Keep in mind that [ICE agents will never ask for money](#).

***PUBLIC NOTARIES*** - Public Notaries (or "notarios") have attempted to offer legal services regarding immigration. Remember that only attorneys or an accredited representative working for a Board of Immigration Appeals approved agency can represent someone before DHS or the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR).

***FAKE IMMIGRATION ATTORNEYS / FAKE ASYLUM*** - Scammers have been posing as immigration attorneys and agents. Some of the fake attorneys file or pretend to file asylum applications for the client, lie that the application has been successful, and then accept payment for their "work." Only after the scammers have been paid does the victim find out that their application was either not filed or not pursued beyond an initial filing. See "Tips" below for information on how to find out if someone is a real attorney or accredited agent.

***WINNING THE VISA LOTTERY*** - People have received emails telling them that they won a green card from the U.S. Department of State (which manages the Diversity Visa Program, also known as the Lottery Visa or Green Card Visa). The State Department will never email someone about being selected in the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program. For more information on Diversity Visa Lottery Scams please see this

***SCAMS TARGETING STUDENTS*** - International students have been tricked into applying to schools that accept their money but are not part of the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP). Schools that are not SEVP accredited cannot sponsor students for an F-1 student visa.

## RECENT SCAM STORIES

### February 2017

Queens, New York – A local man was walking down the street when he was approached by four men wearing ICE jackets who told him he needed to pay them immediately or he would be deported. The victim gave the four men all the cash he had and they left. The four imposter ICE agents have not been caught.

**Source:** ABC 7 New York

<http://abc7ny.com/news/nyc-warns-of-fake-ice-agents-scamming-undocumented-immigrants/1755316/>

### March 2017

Greenville, South Carolina – A convicted con man was charged with extortion for swindling more than \$70,000 from six different victims by posing as an immigration officer. The scammer offered victims immigration documents and told them he could help get their relatives into the country, for a fee.

**Source:**

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/nation/2017/03/09/con-artists-prey-immigrants-fearing-trump-crackdown/a75LYUd7lrB7ZL3pA0yQL/story.html>

Tacoma, Washington – A federal court in Tacoma entered a \$50,000 judgment against a Tacoma notario who engaged in an immigration scam. The notario was neither an attorney nor an accredited agent. The notario charged a couple \$2,000 to help them obtain green cards. In fact, the couple were ineligible for green cards and their applications were rejected.

**Source:**

<http://www.tacomaweekly.com/news/article/bulletin-board160>

**JOB OFFERS** - People have received emails offering fake jobs in the U.S. and asking them to pay money to receive the full job information. Even if a job offer is legitimate, you are not allowed to work in the United States unless you are a lawful permanent resident (Green Card holder), have an [Employment Authorization Document](#) or work permit, or have an employment visa which allows you to work for a particular employer. See our "[Job Scams](#)" newsletter for more information on job scams.

### TIPS TO AVOID IMMIGRATION SCAMS

**Only a lawyer or an accredited agent of an organization recognized by the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) can give legal advice.** To

find out if someone is a lawyer, ask them what state "bar" (a professional association of lawyers) they belong to and then visit <http://statebarassociations.org/ba.htm> and click on that state. If they are a licensed lawyer they will be on the list for that state. To find out if an individual or organization is a BIA accredited representative visit [www.justice.gov/eoir/ra/raroster.htm](http://www.justice.gov/eoir/ra/raroster.htm).

- 1. To find a California immigration attorney who doesn't charge or charges low fees click [here](#).** For low-cost or no-cost immigration attorneys in other states visit <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/list-pro-bono-legal-service-providers-map>.
- 2. Never pay for blank government forms.** Government forms are free, although you may have to pay a fee to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) when you submit your forms. USCIS forms can be found at <https://www.uscis.gov/forms>.
- 3. Get immigration information from government websites (websites ending with .gov).** This means the website is from the U.S. government.
- 4. Don't let anyone hold on to or keep your original documents, like a passport or a birth certificate.** Scammers sometimes keep these documents until you pay them to get them back.
- 5. USCIS will never ask for payments or personal information over the phone.** If you have any doubts about someone claiming to be a government agent asking for money or personal information related to immigration, call USCIS or the police.
- 6. Don't trust someone who says that they can speed up or guarantee immigration benefits if you apply through them instead of directly with USCIS.**
- 7. Always make a copy of your documents and make sure to get and keep your receipt from USCIS** after filing your documents with them.

## Contact Us

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619-533-5500

[www.sandiego.gov/cityattorney](http://www.sandiego.gov/cityattorney)  
[cityattorney@sandiego.gov](mailto:cityattorney@sandiego.gov)

## File a Complaint with Us

Call our hotline

- (619) 533-5600
- 9:00am to 5:00pm
- Monday through Friday

Fill out the complaint form

- [www.sandiego.gov/cityattorney/divisions/communityjustice/cepu](http://www.sandiego.gov/cityattorney/divisions/communityjustice/cepu)
- Mail the form, or
- E-mail the form

## Agency Reference Sheet

Consult the reference sheet for list of agencies that investigate consumer complaints

## Written by Jimmy Greenblatt

The information provided in this newsletter is intended to convey general information and is not intended to be relied upon as legal advice.

The San Diego City Attorney's office cannot provide legal advice to private parties.

8. If you have immigration questions you can call USCIS customer service at (800) 375-5283.
9. If you or someone you know has been the victim of an immigration scam or if you have knowledge of or suspect an immigration scam, **please call the San Diego City Attorney's Consumer & Environmental Protection Unit Hotline at (619) 533-5600.**

Please visit the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](http://www.epa.gov) for additional information.

## The Role of CEPU in San Diego



The Unit is dedicated to investigating citizen complaints and prosecuting criminal and civil violations of California's unfair competition and other consumer laws committed in the City of San Diego.