



# Consumer News

## San Diego City Attorney's Office

Spring 2016

Consumer and Environmental Protection Unit (CEPU)

### In This Issue

If you believe you have been a victim of an immigration service or any other scam in the City of San Diego, we want to help you

### Immigration Consultant Law

California Business and Profession Code §22440-22449

### State Resources Available

California Department of Justice-  
Office of Immigrant Assistance  
(888) 587- 0557

State Bar of California  
(800) 843-9053

### Verify an Immigration Consultant has a \$100,000 Bond as required by law

California Secretary of State  
(916) 653-4984

### Verify Non-Attorney is an Accredited Representative

BIA Accredited Representative

### Contact Us

Office of the City Attorney,  
Consumer and Environmental  
Protection Unit  
1200 Third Avenue, Suite 700  
San Diego, CA 92101-4103  
619-533-5500  
[www.sandiego.gov/cityattorney](http://www.sandiego.gov/cityattorney)  
[cityattorney@sandiego.gov](mailto:cityattorney@sandiego.gov)

## Immigration Consultant Scams

Immigrants in the City of San Diego have always been a population vulnerable to fraud and deception. San Diego is full of ethnic communities with immigrants ranging from undocumented to legal citizens. Often, victims of immigration scams are hesitant to file a complaint because of their immigration status. Also, these victims may not be aware of the resources available to help them. Regardless of immigration status, every consumer has a right to protection against fraud.

Immigration consultants are not lawyers. It is unlawful for an immigration consultant to give legal advice such as advising a person what forms to file or advising what to answer on those forms. They can only provide non-legal assistance such as (1) completing federal and state agency forms, (2) translating answers to questions on those forms, (3) providing copies of supporting documents needed to complete the forms, (4) submitting completed forms if requested, and (5) making referrals for legal assistance.

*Calif. Bus. And Prof. Code §22441.*

## Recognizing an Immigration Scam



A victim's immigration status can be permanently destroyed or damaged as a result of immigration fraud. These scams could impact (1) undocumented persons trying to become lawful permanent residents, (2) permanent residents trying to become U.S. citizens, and (3) U.S. citizens trying to legalize their relatives.

- Make sure the immigration consultant is qualified under the Immigration Consultant Law requirements.
- Immigration consultant cannot guarantee or promise a work permit or other immigration benefit.  
*Calif. Bus. And Prof. Code §22444(b)*
- Immigration consultant cannot imply influence with the INS.  
*Calif. Bus. And Prof. Code §22444(c)*

## File a Complaint with Us

Call our hotline

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

Fill out the complaint form

- Complaint Form
- Mail the form, or
- E-mail the form

Agency Reference Sheet

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

## News Sources

### NBC San Diego

<http://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/Micallela-Aguilera-Coleman-Accused-of-Posing-as-Immigration-Attorney-Arrested-299137611.html>

### Office of the United States Attorney

<https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdca/pr/attorney-sentenced-4-million-fraud>

### Los Angeles City Attorney's Office

<http://www.lacityattorney.org/#!City-Attorney-Mike-Feuer-Files-Multiple-Criminal-Charges-Following-Undercover-Investigation-Consumer-Complaints-of-Immigration-Scams/c1143/56fd596e0cf2fa22e0ea2e9f>

## Written by Martin Nuñez

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 citizens or residents within the City of San Diego

- Immigration consultant cannot charge a fee for a referral for services they cannot perform.  
*Calif. Bus. And Prof. Code §22444(d)*
- Requesting total price of service up front, and requesting more money to continue service is usually sign of a scam.

## Recent Immigration Scams

### April 2015

According to NBC San Diego, a fake attorney was investigated for immigration fraud in South Bay San Diego. An undocumented family met Micallela Aguilera Coleman at church and paid her \$3,000 for legal help and immigration services. The fake attorney gave them unlawful legal advice and never showed up to an immigration appointment.

### July 2015

According to the U.S. Attorney's Office, Gino Pietro scammed federal detainees who were in federal custody on immigration charges in San Diego. Pietro had his investigator falsely represent he was an attorney to get access to the federal detainees. They promised to resolve the detainees' immigration charges for \$6,000-\$10,000. As a result, six detainees paid \$3,000 each for legal help they never received.

### March 2016

According to the Los Angeles City Attorney's Office, a consumer filed a complaint against Gloria Saucedo and her business Hermandad Mexicana Transnacional, Inc. for immigration fraud. Investigators conducted three undercover investigations in 2014 and noted numerous violations of the Immigrant Consultant Act. Gloria and her business were each charged with multiple misdemeanor counts in violation of Immigration Consultants Act and unlicensed practice of law.

## The Role of CEPU in San Diego



The Unit prosecutes violations of law that arise from consumer transactions or actions that damage the environment. 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.

The Unit works with local, state, and federal agencies to address environmental issues and investigate criminal matters. The Deputy City Attorney's and Investigator's in CEPU are assigned to many task forces aimed at protecting the residents of San Diego from those who violate the environmental rules and laws designed to protect them and their quality of life.