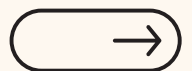




Removal Defense & Protection: Consumer Safety Alert: Spotting Notario Fraud & Immigration Scams

A Protective Guide to Verifying Legal Credentials, Avoiding Scams,
and Finding Legitimate Counsel



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Welcome & Overview

Navigating the United States immigration system can be deeply challenging, leading many applicants to look for affordable assistance. Unfortunately, scammers frequently exploit this vulnerability by posing as licensed legal professionals. A widespread trap involves "notarios" or consultants who promise guaranteed results, manipulate government documents, and charge high fees for services they are not legally authorized to perform.

In many Latin American countries, a "notario público" is a highly trained attorney with significant legal authority. However, in the United States, a notary public is simply a state-commissioned witness authorized only to verify signatures on paperwork. This consumer alert details the key differences in credentials, highlights common scam red flags, and explains how to confirm your legal representative is fully licensed to protect your case from severe penalties.

Important Notice: Working with an unlicensed consultant or notary public can result in the immediate denial of your application, forfeiture of government filing fees, and the unintended initiation of removal proceedings. This guide serves as an educational safety resource and does not constitute formal legal representation. Gonzalez Law Offices charges for thorough case evaluations, application audits, and specialized removal defense strategies.

The 4 Core Checklists for Spotting Scams and Verifying Counsel

Section 1: The "Notario" Invalidation and Credential Checklist

Understanding who is legally authorized to represent you before federal agencies is your primary defense against fraudulent filings:

- **Licensed Attorneys:** A licensed immigration attorney must be an active member in good standing of the bar association of any U.S. state, territory, or the District of Columbia, allowing them to practice immigration law nationwide.
- **DOJ Accredited Representatives:** Non-attorneys can legally represent you only if they are officially accredited by the Department of Justice (DOJ) and work directly for a recognized, non-profit organization registered in the EOIR roster.
- **The Notary Public Limitation:** A standard U.S. notary public is strictly prohibited by law from providing legal advice, selecting immigration forms, analyzing your case strategy, or representing you at a government interview.
- **The Form G-28 Standard:** A legitimate, authorized attorney or DOJ accredited representative will always complete and submit an official Form G-28, Notice of Entry of Appearance as Attorney or Accredited Representative, directly alongside your application package to formally alert the government of their role.

Section 2: Critical Red Flags and Deceptive Consulting Tactics

Scammers consistently utilize specific manipulative promises and non-compliant processing tactics to deceive applicants. Watch out for these operational red flags:

- **Guaranteed Outcome Promises:** Be highly suspicious of any individual who guarantees that your application will be approved, claims to have a "secret connection" inside USCIS, or promises to expedite your case through backdoor channels.
- **The Blank Document Trap:** Never, under any circumstances, sign a blank form, a blank sheet of paper, or an application that contains empty text fields. Scammers routinely write in fraudulent information after you sign, making you legally responsible for the misrepresentations.



- **Refusing a Written Contract:** Legitimate legal professionals will provide a clear, detailed written contract outlining the specific services to be performed, the exact fees charged, and the timeline for your case. Walk away if an individual refuses to provide a written agreement.
- **Cash-Only Demands Without Receipts:** Avoid individuals who demand large upfront fees strictly in cash and refuse to provide an itemized receipt. Always pay government filing fees directly to the "Department of Homeland Security" via a trackable check or money order, never to a consultant's personal account.

Section 3: Direct Verification Protocols for Consumers

You do not have to rely on a consultant's word regarding their qualifications. Use these open public portals to verify their active standing independently:

- **State Bar Association Registries:** Request the full name and bar admission number of your attorney, then look up their profile on the official state bar website to confirm their status is listed as "Active" or "In Good Standing."
- **The EOIR Roster of Accredited Representatives:** Access the Department of Justice online portal to check the official Roster of Recognized Organizations and Accredited Representatives to confirm a non-profit advocate is genuinely authorized.
- **The EOIR Discipline List:** Check the Executive Office for Immigration Review public database for the List of Currently Disciplined Practitioners to ensure an attorney has not been suspended, disbarred, or censured for unethical behavior.
- **Retaining Document Control:** Always demand a complete photocopy of every form, receipt notice, and piece of correspondence submitted to or received from the government for your personal records. An individual who refuses to give you copies of your own case files is acting fraudulently.

Section 4: Remediating Damage and Reporting Scams Securely

If you discover that you have fallen victim to an immigration scam or an unauthorized practitioner, taking immediate action can help save your application:

- **File an Independent Status Check:** Enter your receipt numbers directly into the secure online USCIS Case Status Tool to see exactly what has been filed under your name and check for any outstanding deadlines.
- **Submit a Form G-28 Revocation:** Work with a licensed attorney to formally revoke any prior unauthorized representation by submitting an updated Form G-28, ensuring the government stops sending case updates to the scammer.
- **Report to Consumer Protection Agencies:** File a formal complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) or your state's Attorney General Consumer Protection Unit. These agencies investigate unauthorized legal practices without sharing your data with immigration enforcement teams.
- **Audit Your File History:** Have a qualified attorney request a full copy of your immigration history through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) submission to review exactly what statements were made in your past filings, allowing you to proactively correct any fraudulent information.



Key Takeaways for Applicants

- **You Are Liable for the Data:** The U.S. government holds you legally responsible for all information contained in an application you sign. Claiming you did not know a notario wrote in false statements will not excuse fraud penalties.
- **Ask for Credentials Upfront:** A true professional will gladly display their bar certificates, offer their registration numbers, and provide a clear contract. If someone acts offended when you ask for proof, look for counsel elsewhere.
- **Keep Your Original Documents:** Never leave your original passport, birth certificate, or marriage license with a consultant. Scammers often hold these vital identity documents hostage to force you to pay additional hidden fees.





Need Personalized Guidance?

Protecting your family and safeguarding your legal status requires working with verified, fully licensed legal counsel you can trust. At Gonzalez Law Offices, we provide clear, authorized legal representation, audit complex case histories, and aggressively protect our clients from fraudulent traps throughout their immigration journey.

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