

18 Steps You Can Take to Protect Yourself From Dishonest Immigration Consultants

If you end up dealing with a dishonest consultant, you are likely to lose money and possibly face removal or deportation from the United States.

When shopping around for help with immigration matters, be sure to:

1. Ask about the consultant's educational background and work experience.
2. Discuss price. If the consultant is not significantly less expensive than a lawyer, find another consultant or look for an attorney to help you.
3. Make sure you get a contract. Read it carefully before signing. In many states, there is specific information that this contract must include. Make sure you get a copy of the contract and any other documents the consultant prepares for you.
4. Be suspicious if the consultant's promises sound too good to be true.
5. Whenever you make a payment, get a signed receipt.
6. If the consultant has typed a legal form or document for you, read it carefully before signing it. If you cannot read English, bring someone who can translate the documents for you. In some states, the consultant must provide you with a translated copy.
7. Don't let the consultant keep your original documents or photos.

8. Don't sign blank application forms.
9. Avoid consultants that pressure you to pay immediately.
10. Ask questions. You should not hire a consultant who refuses to answer your questions.

Where Can I Go For Help?

Consult your local legal services office, volunteer lawyers project (often coordinated through the local bar association), or local department of consumer affairs. If you are having problems with a lawyer, call the state bar where the lawyer is licensed. You may also be able to find help from the state Attorney General, local District Attorney, or police department.

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BEWARE of Dishonest Immigration Consultants

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Who Are Immigration Consultants?

Immigration consultants specialize in assisting consumers with immigration law matters. They are not attorneys and are usually not supervised by attorneys.

Are Immigration Consultants "Accredited Representatives"?

No. Accredited Representatives are qualified by, and work for, agencies that are approved by the U.S. Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA). These representatives are allowed to speak for you at interviews with immigration officers and in immigration hearings. They cannot represent you in criminal or civil court cases.

Typical Problems With Immigration Consultants

Immigration law is complicated. Dishonest immigration consultants know this. They also know that the laws confuse many immigrants.

Unscrupulous immigration consultants take advantage of vulnerable immigrants in many ways, including:

- charging exorbitant fees for immigration services and then failing to file any documents,

- promising to get green cards, work visas or other benefits for ineligible immigrants,
- filing false asylum claims,
- charging fees to prepare applications for nonexistent immigration programs, and
- falsely claiming to have connections with I.N.S.

What Can Immigration Consultants Legally Do?

In most states, immigration consultants can:

- give you materials, law books and forms-so that you can prepare legal documents yourself.
- give you a list of forms and legal documents.
- type or fill out forms for you if you tell the consultant what to write.
- file forms in court for you if you tell the consultant what to file.
- serve legal papers on other parties.

Immigration Consultants Usually Cannot:

- tell you what forms you need for your case.
- fill out forms for you if you do not tell the consultant what to write.

tell you what kind of immigration category (such as asylum or labor certification) you should apply for.

When Should I Consult An Attorney?

If a form or legal document is too complicated for you to understand or to fill out yourself, you should not count on the consultant to figure it out for you. Instead, you should try to find an attorney to help you. Don't assume you cannot afford an attorney. Many legitimate attorneys charge less than immigration consultants. You may not have to pay at all if you qualify for free legal services. To find out more, contact your local legal aid office.

You should also be careful when looking for an attorney. Shop around and ask a lot of questions. If possible, get recommendations from friends or relatives you trust.

Remember: An immigration consultant is not a lawyer and may not know all of the relevant law in your case.