

**Legal Services
for Immigrants
Newsletter**

August, 2012

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Catholic Charities' Legal Service for Immigrants Program is beginning a free newsletter for the immigrant community. Our goal is raise awareness of immigration issues for the immigrant community. Our first newsletter focuses on something that the immigrant community should fear as much as they fear being arrested by immigration: incompetent immigration advice.

The process of immigration scares most people. The law is confusing, the filing fees are expensive and simple mistakes can be devastating. It is critical to get good advice during the entire process.

The most important step in getting good immigration advice is finding someone who knows immigration law. Only two types of people know immigration law: specially accredited representatives at certain non-profit agencies and attorneys who specialize in immigration.

Friends, family members, neighbors, tax preparers, notaries public and community workers **are not** competent to give immigration advice. It is important to know that notaries public are not attorneys in the United States. Notaries have no special training or education that allows them to practice law or deal with immigration. In fact, immigration will not allow them to represent you.

People should shop around for someone to help them. Remember that you are a customer and that you are buying a service. No one is doing you a favor taking your case. Talk to several immigration lawyers and see who seems to know the most.

Ask if the attorney belongs to the Catholic Legal Immi-

gration Network or the American Immigration Lawyers Association. If the person is an accredited representative, ask to see the Board of Immigration Appeals accreditation.

Think about it. If you were buying a used car you would go to several dealerships and ask for a Carfax report. You should be at least as careful and smart in choosing immigration help.

Never let anyone write to immigration, call immigration or contact immigration on your behalf unless that person is an immigration attorney or an accredited representative. There is no such thing as a simple little form or phone call.

My first deportation client found herself in deportation because a well-meaning community worker mailed a change of address form to immigration. The poor client did not know that immigration was looking for her. One week after mailing in the change of address form, the woman was in deportation.

I have three clients now who are in immigration because a community agency took them to immigration to apply for something for which they did not qualify. Now all three are in deportation.

Sometimes doing nothing is better than doing something wrong.

There are countless stories like this. Each week we see families who mistakenly believe that a simple trip to Ciudad Juarez will end in lawful permanent residency for someone they love. But because they relied on a notary, the family member



cannot come back.

Immigrants like everyone else just want to keep their families together. That desire, however, can make some people believe what they want to hear.

Don't let yourself fall into that trap. Find good advice. The answer may not be what you want to hear, but it is better than the kind of false hope that can end in your family being split up.

by: Barb Graham, J.D.

Catholic Charities
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