

**ATTORNEY GENERAL CUOMO SUES TWO IMMIGRATION
SERVICES ORGANIZATIONS FOR PROVIDING FRAUDULENT
LEGAL SERVICES**

Lawsuit seeks restitution and an end to fraudulent practices

Today's lawsuit is latest action in Cuomo's ongoing immigration fraud investigation

[\[En Español\]](#)

UPDATE: This afternoon, the Attorney General successfully obtained a temporary restraining order against the International Immigrants Foundation, Inc. ("IIF"), International Professional Association, Inc. ("IPA"), and their President Edward Juarez.

According to the order, the organizations must refrain from providing immigration services and from soliciting new clients. The order also prohibits the destruction of any records and freezes the assets of both the organizations and Edward Juarez.

The order, which takes effect immediately, was issued by Judge Barbara R. Kapnick of the New York State Supreme Court.

The Office of the Attorney General will coordinate with several New York legal associations to help handle the organizations' existing cases and to protect innocent victims.

NEW YORK, NY (January 14, 2010) - Attorney General Andrew M. Cuomo today sued two immigration services organizations for defrauding immigrants with false promises of citizenship, engaging in the unauthorized practice of law, and illegally charging exorbitant fees for services. The lawsuits were filed against International Immigrants Foundation, Inc. ("IIF"), International Professional Association, Inc. ("IPA"), and their President Edward Juarez, all operating in New York City. IIF and IPA are both not-for-profit organizations that generate millions of dollars in revenue each year.

The Attorney General seeks to prevent these organizations from continuing their fraudulent practices and seeks restitution for victims. The Office of the Attorney General is also coordinating with several New York legal associations to help handle the organizations' existing cases and to protect innocent victims. This case is a part of Attorney General Cuomo's ongoing investigation into immigration fraud.

"These businesses make millions of dollars by exploiting the dreams of New York's immigrant community," said Attorney General Cuomo. "By lying about their ability to provide legitimate legal services, these organizations threaten to devastate families and their hopes of a new life. We intend to hold these organizations accountable for their actions and their blatant disregard for the people they claim to help."

The Attorney General's lawsuit alleges that IIF and IPA misrepresent their qualifications to provide immigration-related legal services, falsely promise specific legal results, and illegally charge excessive fees for their services. Specifically, they lure immigrants through newspaper advertisements, articles, conferences, and television and radio shows to purchase a "membership" with their organization by promising that members receive special privileges including free or low cost legal representation. Membership costs include a \$100 registration fee and dues of \$30 per month. However, members are then charged at least several thousand dollars more to have immigration papers prepared and filed. They also provide members with their "International Citizen Photo Identification Card," which they falsely claim guarantees legal representation and provides special privileges if the member is detained by law enforcement agencies.

The illegal actions of IIF and IPA have disastrous consequences on immigrant communities. In addition to being forced to pay substantial fees, victims and their families are put at risk of suffering permanent damage as a result of receiving incorrect immigration-related legal advice. In one instance, an individual who followed the advice of IIF and IPA was detained and the organizations never appeared to represent him. Another member was eligible to obtain a Green Card, but lost his opportunity due to the organizations' delay and negligence, despite paying more than \$18,000 in fees and costs. Other clients were subject to

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deportation due to inadequate or negligent legal representation.

New York State law prohibits a non-lawyer from practicing law, appearing as or purporting to be an attorney-at-law, or providing legal advice of any kind. Non-lawyers can only provide clerical services, such as translating or mailing documents, unless the non-lawyer has been accredited and his or her organization has been recognized by the federal Board of Immigration Appeals. Further, it is illegal for not-for-profit immigrant service providers to charge excessive fees for services. The services must be provided free of charge or at a very nominal rate.

New York State Senator José M. Serrano said, "Immigrants helped build this city, state and nation. Defrauding immigrants is not only an injustice to an integral segment of the Latino community, but to all New Yorkers. I look forward to continuing to work with Attorney General Cuomo to combat immigration fraud and help secure the future of new citizens."

New York State Assemblyman Adriano Espaillat said, "New York City's immigrant communities are an integral part of our identity and our character. Unfortunately, unscrupulous scammers systematically target immigrants and try to exploit them. Often, victims of these schemes are only trying to secure a better life for themselves and their families. Attorney General Cuomo's action will help put a stop to one of the most egregious offenders and will help keep thousands of New York's immigrant families safe."

New York State Assemblyman Peter Rivera said, "Fraudulent organizations that scam immigrants and provide faulty legal advice can cause life-altering effects for hard-working immigrants and their entire families. Without action, these organizations would continue to rob immigrants of their savings while jeopardizing their ability to pursue a life in this country. I stand firmly with the Attorney General in combating immigration fraud and in working to bring these scammers to justice."

Jason Abrams, Chair of Committee on the Unauthorized Practice of Law for the American Immigration Lawyers Association in New York said, "By filing this lawsuit, the Attorney General has taken yet another significant step in protecting immigrant communities from fraud. In hope of renewing or obtaining legal status, many immigrants pay thousands of dollars - their life savings in most instances - to people who advertise and falsely claim to be lawyers and falsely promise to obtain residency or citizenship for their customers. This conduct is not only morally wrong; it is also illegal. And legitimate immigration lawyers are often left picking up the pieces for these families. The Attorney General's ongoing effort to combat immigration fraud has and continues to make a huge difference in protecting communities throughout this State."

Today's lawsuit is the latest stage of Attorney General Cuomo's ongoing investigation into allegations that immigrants and their families are being targeted for fraudulent and unauthorized immigration-related services in New York. Over the past several months, the Attorney General shut down four businesses for providing legal services to thousands of immigrants without being licensed to do so. The companies were required to pay more than \$100,000 in penalties and were permanently prohibited from operating immigration services businesses. Attorney General Cuomo has also sued three organizations for engaging in the unauthorized practice of law and targeting immigrants and has issued more than 100 subpoenas to businesses and individuals allegedly engaged in unauthorized immigration-related services.

The case against IIF, IPA, and Mr. Juarez is being handled by Assistant Deputy Counselor Elizabeth De León and Assistant Attorneys General Vilda Vera Mayuga and Sandra Abeles of the Attorney General's Civil Rights Bureau, under the supervision of Civil Rights Bureau Chief Alphonso B. David and Counsel for Civil Rights Spencer Freedman, and by Assistant Attorneys General Caroline Press and Lauren Kittilsen of the Attorney General's Charities Bureau, under the supervision of Charities Bureau Chief Jason Lilien, with the assistance of Investigators John McManus and David Negrón.

If you have been a victim of immigration assistance fraud, please contact the Attorney General's Immigration Services Fraud Unit Hotline at (866) 390-2992 or visit www.ag.ny.gov.

Attachment:

[Verified Complaint](#)

1/26/2010

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