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**Attorney General Abbott Takes Legal Action To Halt Six South Texas
"Notarios"**

*State accuses notaries public of providing unauthorized legal advice, document
preparation*

MCALLEN – Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott took enforcement actions against six Rio Grande Valley “notarios” for defrauding their customers and violating the Texas Deceptive Trade Practices Act (DTPA), the state's Notary Public Act, and the State Bar Act.

The state’s legal actions, which were filed in Hidalgo and Cameron counties, sought and obtained a temporary restraining order and injunction against six defendants: Anna Trejo; Dora Maria Resendez; Josefina Fonseca, who does business as Fonseca Services; Maria Alvarado, who does business as Mary’s Bookkeeping & Income Tax; Maria Yolanda Solis; Emilio Zabala, who does business as Azteca Immigration.

According to State investigators, the defendants – all commissioned Texas notaries public – solicited customers by falsely claiming that they had the skill or knowledge necessary to handle their clients’ immigration cases. Under federal law, only licensed attorneys and organizations accredited by the Dept. of Justice’s Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) may offer immigration consulting services. The State’s legal actions charge all six defendants with unlawfully offering immigration-related services despite the fact that they were neither properly accredited nor licensed to do so.

Texas law authorizes notaries public to witness the signing of legal documents – but specifically forbids them from providing immigration services unless they hold a separate license to practice law. Scam artists have long exploited the misunderstanding between the term “notary” and the similar-sounding Spanish term “notario público,” which is used in Latin America to describe highly experienced, specialized attorneys.

Today’s enforcement actions each seek civil penalties of up to \$20,000 per violation of the DTPA.

Since assuming office in 2002, Attorney General Abbott has shut down more than 50 businesses for providing unauthorized legal services – six of them in the Rio Grande Valley area. Former or current clients of an unauthorized legal services scam should file a complaint with the Attorney General’s Office at (800) 252-8011 or online at www.texasattorneygeneral.gov.

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