

## **ATTORNEY GENERAL CUOMO SHUTS DOWN FRAUDULENT IMMIGRATION SERVICES ORGANIZATION AND OBTAINS \$1.2 MILLION FOR VICTIMS**

### **American Immigrants Federation and its President Estela Figueredo Defrauded Thousands of Victims**

#### **Latest Action in Cuomo's Ongoing Immigration Fraud Investigation**

NEW YORK, NY (April 14, 2010) - Attorney General Andrew M. Cuomo today announced that his office has shut down American Immigrants Federation ("AIF") for defrauding immigrants with false promises of citizenship, engaging in the unauthorized practice of law, and illegally charging exorbitant fees for services.

The organization, its president Estela Figueredo, and its affiliates must immediately stop all immigration services, shut down all of their operations, and pay \$1.2 million in restitution for victims of this fraud. AIF is a not-for-profit organization based in New York City with more than 20,000 customers. This case is a part of Attorney General Cuomo's ongoing investigation into immigration fraud.

The Office of the Attorney General is coordinating with several New York legal associations to help handle AIF's existing cases and to protect innocent victims. AIF's affiliates include American Legal Immigration Services, Inc., American Legal Immigrant Services, Inc., American Immigrant Advertising Services, Inc., American Advertising Agency, Inc., and American Immigrant Services, Inc.

"This case should send a message to companies that think they can exploit immigrants and get away with it," said Attorney General Cuomo.

"After our previous actions against scammers that target immigrants, more and more victims of fraud have come forward and brought cases to our office. As with this case, individuals who try to take advantage of immigrants will not get away with it in New York State."

The Attorney General began an investigation of AIF after receiving complaints that the organization and its affiliates were making false promises to consumers concerning immigration-related matters. The investigation revealed that AIF misrepresented their qualifications to provide legal services, illegally charged customers excessive fees for services that were not performed, and allowed non-lawyers to provide legal advice to customers. Specifically, AIF lured immigrants through 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 was purchased through a \$100 annual fee, but members were then charged at least several thousand dollars more to have immigration papers prepared and filed.

As a result of a settlement with the Attorney General's office, AIF and its affiliates must immediately stop all immigration services and shut down their operations. The company will also pay \$1.2 million in restitution for victims of their fraud. Additionally, AIF president Estela Figueredo is personally barred from providing any immigration services in the future.

The illegal actions of AIF 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.

Individuals who followed the advice of AIF have been subject to 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.

Today's action is the latest stage of Attorney General Cuomo's ongoing efforts to protect immigrants and their families from being targeted by fraudulent immigration services in New York. Other actions include:

In March 2010, the Attorney General obtained a \$3 million court judgment against a Queens County individual, Miriam Hernandez, for defrauding immigrants by claiming that she could help them gain citizenship.

In January 2010, the Attorney General sued and obtained a temporary restraining order against International Immigrants Foundation, International Professional Association, and their President Edward Juarez for engaging in fraud and the unauthorized practice of law. The case is currently pending in the New York State Supreme Court.

In August 2009, the Attorney General shut down three companies - Immigration Solutions and Systems, Inc. of Manhattan, Alisandra Multiservices, Inc. of Brentwood, Long Island, and All Immigration Services of Great Neck, Long Island - for providing unauthorized and fraudulent legal services to immigrant communities and required that they pay full restitution to all victims. The companies were required to pay more than \$100,000 in penalties and were permanently prohibited from operating immigration services businesses.

In August 2009, the Attorney General sued three companies - Immigration Community Service Corporation, Professional Solutions Consultants (d/b/a Reliable Clerical Services and Reliable Immigration Services), and Centro Santa Ana - all located in Queens for providing unauthorized and fraudulent legal services to immigrant communities and is seeking injunctive relief, restitution, and penalties. These cases are currently pending in the New York Supreme Court.

The Attorney General has also issued more than 100 subpoenas to businesses and individuals allegedly engaged in unauthorized immigration-related services.

New York State Senator José M. Serrano said, "New York City has always been a city of immigrants. To this day, they drive our economy, contribute to our culture, and add to our cherished diversity. It is extremely important that we shine a light on the terrible problems that immigrants face in our state. Many immigrants are often targeted victims of abuse from within their own communities, even from people who claim to help them. I am proud to stand with Attorney General Cuomo to fight immigration fraud and help ensure the protection of all New Yorkers."

New York State Assemblyman Adriano Espaillat said, "Our city has long prided itself for being the home of immigrants from every corner of the globe. This great diversity benefits us all. Sadly, some unscrupulous individuals have tried to prey on our immigrant communities, stealing their hard-earned money through lies and deceit. I applaud Attorney General Cuomo for helping to put an end to the outright exploitation of New York's immigrant community."

New York State Assemblyman Félix Ortiz said, "Immigrant communities continue to be victimized by unscrupulous individuals who prey on their vulnerability and steal their hard-earned money through lies and false promises. The consequences can be devastating, wiping out savings and in some instances separating families. I commend Attorney General Cuomo for all of his work in holding these scammers accountable and protecting immigrant New Yorkers."

Deborah J. Notkin, Co-Chair of Committee on the Unauthorized Practice of Law for the American Immigration Lawyers Association in New York, said, "This settlement

shutting down American Immigrants Federation, and the other immigration fraud settlements that Attorney General Cuomo has reached, not only puts a halt to widespread abuse and fraud, but helps thousands of victims. It also sends a strong message that there is no place in New York State of this type of predatory abuse. I thank Attorney General Cuomo for fighting to protect all New Yorkers from these devastating scams and bringing these individuals and companies to justice."

The immigrant community is a vital part of the fabric of New York State. There are more than 3,000,000 immigrants living in New York State. Immigrants from 148 different countries represent thirty-six percent of New York City's population, forty-three percent of its workforce, and sixty percent of homeowners.

These cases are being handled by Assistant Deputy Counselor Elizabeth De León and Assistant Attorney General Sandra Abeles with the assistance of Investigators John McManus, David Negron, and Angel Laporte, under the supervision of Civil Rights Bureau Chief Alphonso B. David and Counsel for Civil Rights Spencer Freedman.

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](http://www.ag.ny.gov).