

Fraud a danger for immigrants offered work permits

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SEATTLE (AP) — Immigrant activists scored a major victory when President [Barack Obama](#) halted deportations of many illegal immigrants brought to the United States as children, but they now worry that young people hopeful about their futures could be deceived by others looking to make a quick buck.

"The biggest risk of a scam is right now," said [Jorge Baron](#) of the Seattle-based Northwest Immigrant Rights Project. "Because right now we have to tell people, 'We don't know.'"

Baron said he's concerned about unscrupulous people who will ask for money to submit applications, even though there is no process yet. Or that they will try to convince immigrants who don't qualify that they should apply — for a price.

"Part of the problem is because immigration law is so complex. There is this inevitability of wanting to hear good news. There are people who want to believe that," Baron said.

Under the administration plan, illegal immigrants will be immune from deportation if they were brought to the United States before they turned 16 and are younger than 30, have been in the country for at least five continuous years, have no criminal history, graduated from a U.S. high school or earned a GED or served in the military. They also can apply for a work permit that will be good for two years with no limits on how many times it can be renewed.

From the morning of the announcement, Baron's legal aid office has been fielding a flurry of calls from people wondering if they can apply for the new immunity. But the process of how people can apply won't be known for about another six weeks.

Applicants "need to be patient," Baron said, and when there is an actual process they should seek qualified help.

An email inquiry to the [Department of Homeland Security](#) was not answered.

Even without the new immunity rule, the country's immigration system is rife with fraud and scams. Illegal immigrants often use forged documents to get work. Then there are scammers who target the illegal immigrants desperate to get legal documents — many don't speak English, and won't go to authorities if preyed upon.

In Washington state alone, 150 people were deported in 2003 after following legal advice from a woman who fraudulently advertised herself as a lawyer. Eventually, after a lawsuit, the woman

was banned from providing immigration services and ordered to pay more than \$47,000 to former clients.

In the Latino community, warnings about the so-called "notarios publicos" have been sounded by many advocates. They say that these immigration assistants are often not qualified to give assistance.

Between 2010 and 2011, Washington state Attorney General [Rob McKenna](#)'s office brought court actions against 11 immigration assistant outfits, with many of those forced to pay fines.

[Mohammad Abdollahi](#), a member of DreamActivist.org in Washington, D.C., said his organization will use their presence on the Internet and social media to divulge critical information.

"Since we've been using it for advocacy people already know that it's a trusted place to go," said Abdollahi, who added he will wait and see before applying for himself.

According to the administration's figures, about 800,000 young immigrants could be impacted by the plan. Many have grown up in the U.S. and English is their first language. It's a group that has grown up in the information age.

Still, Abdollahi said, they're not immune from scams or cutthroat lawyer fees. His organization plans to come up with average lawyer fees as a guideline.

The last time the government undertook a major immigration program was the 1986 amnesty under President [Ronald Reagan](#). Obama's program is quite smaller in scope and execution.

Reagan's program promised legalization for illegal immigrants. It was divided by applications for people who had been farmworkers and those who weren't. Obama's plan would only provide work permits.

[Doris Meissner](#), a senior fellow at the non-partisan [Migration Policy Institute](#) and a former immigration official, said the farmworker provision of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 saw people using forged documents to get legalization because its rules were loosely written. One of the requirements for application was to have been a farmworker for 90 days.

"We're in an entirely different world today," Meissner said. "Background information is available to the government. It's not an entire paper-based process...With this program, there is much more independently valid evidence that people can show. They can show school records, high school diplomas. That's not stuff that you gin up."

<http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Fraud-a-danger-for-immigrants-offered-work-permits-3679280.php>