



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

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Attorney General Greg Abbott, Federal Officials Launch Multi-Jurisdictional "Notario" Crackdown

State and federal authorities announce nationwide initiative against immigration scams; Attorney General Abbott charges four notarios with violating Texas law

SAN ANTONIO – Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott today joined top officials from the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Federal Trade Commission (FTC), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) to launch a national crackdown on immigration scams. During the launch of the “Combating Immigration Services Scams” initiative, Attorney General Abbott also announced that the State today charged four defendants with violating Texas laws governing notaries public.

Federal officials invited Attorney General Abbott to represent state law enforcement authorities at today’s launch because of the State’s longstanding and ongoing crackdown on notarios. The nationwide crackdown announced today in Washington, D.C., was simultaneously launched in multiple cities across the country, including San Antonio. Deputy Texas Attorney General for Civil Litigation Bill Cobb appeared at the San Antonio announcement, where he discussed four cases that the State of Texas filed against unauthorized legal service providers.

Media links
Attorney General's lawsuit against Estella Cofoid and her businesses
Attorney General's lawsuit against Manuella Aronce, Anna Mata and Aronce Center
Attorney General's lawsuit against Adrian Lara and his firm
Attorney General's lawsuit against Caridad Diaz and her firm

In Dallas County, the Texas Attorney General’s Office charged Estella Saucedo Cofoid, Saucedo Systems Integration, LTD and Saucedo Latino Services with violating a state law that prohibits notaries public from unlawfully practicing immigration law. The Saucedo case was referred to the Attorney General’s Office by the FTC, which uncovered the defendant’s unauthorized immigration law practice. In that case, the Attorney General’s Office is seeking an injunction to prevent the defendants from continuing to improperly advertise Saucedo as a “notario público” and offer authorized legal services.

Under federal law, only licensed attorneys and organizations accredited by the DOJ's Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) may offer immigration consulting services. Although Saucedo and her firms provided immigration-related services, the defendant is neither BIA-accredited nor is she licensed to practice law. Texas law authorizes notaries public to witness the execution of legal documents – but the Notary Public Act specifically forbids notaries from providing immigration-related legal services unless they are also licensed to practice law; failure to comply with this requirement is a violation of the Deceptive Trade Practices Act. 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.

In Parmer County, the State filed an enforcement action against Manuella (Nellie) Castro Aronce, her daughter Anna Lucia Aronce Mata, and Aronce Center. The State also filed two enforcement actions in Hidalgo County. The first enforcement action charged Adrian Lara and his firm, A&B Consulting Services. A second legal action named Caridad Diaz and her firm, Notary Public Income Tax Service. All three enforcement actions charged the defendants with unlawfully offering immigration-related services despite the fact that they lacked the legal authority to do so.

The Attorney General's enforcement actions today each seek civil penalties of up to \$20,000 per violation of the Deceptive Trade Practices Act (DTPA).

Since assuming office in 2002, Attorney General Abbott has shut down more than 60 businesses for providing unauthorized legal services. 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.