

# Immigration scam awareness campaign goes national

*Associated Press*

NEWARK, N.J. — Immigration services scams are getting so sophisticated that fraudsters now advertise online with websites that perfectly mimic those of official government agencies, federal officials said Thursday as they rolled out a nationwide awareness campaign meant to combat such practices.

Officials from several federal, state and local agencies, as well as immigration lawyers and advocates, met in Newark on Thursday to expand nationwide a campaign that started in seven pilot cities. It focuses on enforcement, education and interagency collaboration.

"They are not just high-tech scams, they are people in the neighborhoods: people who know people, people who are out there shaking hands," said Kelvin Chen, an attorney with the Federal Trade Commission, as he spoke about the need to increase awareness among immigrants who are often preyed upon by members of their own communities.

The campaign is aimed at educating legal and illegal immigrants to avoid everything from unlicensed service providers to websites that mimic those of government agencies. Most scams involve people who pretend to be able to provide legal aid or other services for immigrants, take victims' money and fail to deliver.

The initiative is also intended to inform immigrants about how to get legitimate legal help and how to report fraud. It began in Atlanta, Baltimore, Detroit, Los Angeles, New York City, San Antonio, and Fresno, Calif.

The campaign, spearheaded by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, features ads, posters and leaflets published in English and Spanish, and a website with information available in 12 additional languages. USCIS officials say they are working to strengthen partnerships at the federal, state and local levels to improve coordination, information sharing and enforcement.

Several speakers at Thursday's conference said it's often challenging to get victims of immigration scams to report them, either out of fear of deportation, or after the trauma of being scammed not just of money, but often, of important documents such as birth certificates that are sometimes stolen by unscrupulous practitioners.

By the time they reach the offices of attorney Lloyd Bennett of the American Immigration Lawyers Association, they've often been steered wrong elsewhere. Bennett said an acute and ongoing problem in the northern New Jersey communities where he works is with "notarios," or storefront offices that offer an array of immigration services and are prevalent in Spanish-speaking communities. Bennett said the word "notario" or "notary" is actually translated as

"attorney" in many Spanish-speaking countries, so those seeking services assume they are legitimate.

"My clients have absolutely no idea what's going on, they see a sign for a 'notario,' they walk in, they get scammed," Bennett said. "They're given forms or applications for programs that don't exist, or they steal their money, or sometimes applications are filed, but incorrectly, and when it comes to their attention, it's often too late."

<http://online.wsj.com/article/APb1243f28a20a49808a3cc26963f075f8.html>