

Immigrants Scammed in Search of Legal Status: DA

District Attorney works with community to protect undocumented immigrants from crime

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With thousands of illegal immigrants facing deportation, many are trying desperate methods to get citizenship.

Immigration officials say many are being targeted by scammers who say they can help immigrants gain legal status.

"We're seeing people pay up to \$50,000 for these services," said Fernando Carvajal of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The District Attorney's office says one the reasons why these scammers stay in business is because more than half of their victims are not coming forward. Many of them are reportedly hesitant out of fear of being deported.

However the DA's office is reaching out to immigrant communities in an effort to stop these crimes.

Carvajal helped put one of the country's largest immigration scammers in federal prison. The organization pocketed \$1.2 million by posing as a legitimate legal service while victimizing nearly 200 people, a scenario authorities say is on the rise.

Immigration attorney Chris Macaraeg said more common immigration scams are notarios -- or notarys in English. This is someone who can legally file paperwork for you from taxes to immigration documents. But that's where Macaraeg says many don't draw the line.

"Once that person does more than the actual filling out of the form and providing legal advice, they are violating the law," Macaraeg said.

While ICE is trying to come after these illegal scammers, they can't do so without the community's support.

"We want to focus on the people who are scamming who are committing the scams we're not, we don't want to focus on the people who are being scammed."

In the meantime, ICE is asking anyone who may have been scammed or thinks they may know of a scammer to report it. The more details you can give them the better, but you can also remain anonymous.

ICE's hotline is 619-550-5183.

<http://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/Immigrants-Face-Scams-In-Search-For-Legal-Status-147670955.html>