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New York Initiative Aims to Shield Illegal Immigrants From Fraud

By AARON EDWARDS

Gov. [Andrew M. Cuomo](#)'s administration will pursue wide-ranging steps intended to thwart the potential for fraud and unscrupulous practices in response to President Obama's decision to allow many illegal immigrants who came to the United States as children to remain here without fear of deportation.

Mr. Cuomo's plan calls for a multilingual news media outreach campaign, community programs and the mobilization of lawyers across New York State to help immigrants navigate the Obama administration's policy, which was [announced](#) last month.

Some critics of the policy, which will allow hundreds of thousands of young people to work and obtain driver's licenses and other documents, say it is an open invitation to deceitful actions by people who promote themselves as [immigration](#) consultants but often charge exorbitant fees and skirt the law.

Under Mr. Cuomo's plan, which will be announced on Thursday, New York will pay for a team of immigration lawyers to work with organizations throughout the state to help illegal immigrants who qualify for the new policy and who seek federal permission to remain in the United States legally.

Among other requirements, immigrants must have entered the country before age 16, must be in school and must have no criminal records.

The New York Department of State has set aside \$600,000 for the legal counsel team.

The state also plans to expand its immigrant service hot line to include information about the policy and to direct callers to service providers who can help young immigrants.

"I think there is going to be a great deal of fraud, and these young people are going to need a great deal of help responding with the kinds of documents the federal government is going to require of them," Cesar A. Perales, New York's secretary of state, said. "It became clear to us that this was going to be a golden opportunity for scammers."

Since Mr. Obama's announcement, immigrants nationwide have been seeking information on how to apply under the new provision of the law, but many have been turned away because [United States Citizenship and Immigration Services](#) has not finalized the process for accepting and handling applications.

The agency is expected to begin taking applications for deferred action — as the federal reprieve allowing illegal immigrants to stay is officially called — by Aug. 15.

Angy Rivera, 21, who lives in Queens with her mother and three siblings, said she was torn about whether to apply. Though she says she meets the requirements under the provision, she fears that if she is rejected, her mother, who came to the United States illegally from Colombia in 1993, might be at risk.

“Deferred action is like a Band-Aid,” she said. “It doesn’t really solve the problem. If I didn’t get it, I’d be putting my family’s information out there. That doesn’t guarantee that my mom won’t be called in. It’s a tougher decision to make than people think.”

The issue of immigration fraud is a familiar one for Mr. Cuomo: When he was New York’s attorney general, he made cracking down on violators a top priority.

In 2009, he [widened an investigation](#) into businesses and people suspected of fraudulent practices, culminating in more than 50 subpoenas and the shutdown of the American Immigrant Federation, which was one of the state’s largest immigrant service providers, for incorrectly filing papers and using unaccredited lawyers.

“It’s not enough to say to people, ‘Be careful; some people want to take your money,’ ” Mr. Perales said. “What we’re saying is we’re also providing an alternative mechanism. That is what distinguishes what New York State wants to do from others who just warn you.”

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/26/nyregion/in-new-york-a-plan-to-help-illegal-immigrants-avoid-swindlers.html?_r=1