

# O'Brien seeks to avoid immigration-services fraud

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COUNCILMAN Dennis O'Brien says a back-alley scam is happening right under our noses and he wants to put a stop to it.

O'Brien introduced a bill yesterday that would establish new licensing requirements, standards, protections and penalties to better regulate immigration-assistance services.

What does that mean, exactly? Con artists and frauds preying on those seeking citizenship reportedly have left immigrants in financial ruin, taking advantage of language barriers, impoverished or desperate situations or worse.

"Here's what happens: In Latin American countries, 'notario' means lawyer - and not only are they lawyers, but they hold judicial posts in their government," O'Brien said. "So when these people hold themselves out as notarios and people are looking for a path to citizenship, they think they're lawyers like they are in Latin American countries, and these guys have no credentials whatsoever."

O'Brien said many so-called notarios "steal thousands of dollars and miss the timely filings. A crime is a crime, and we're going to try to establish, educationally, what notario fraud is. Today, we're introducing a piece of legislation that calls for standards. We want to build that capacity doing business. Don't go to those guys. Come to us. This is the real deal."

The city currently has no regulation when it comes to immigration-assistance services. O'Brien said his bill, if passed, would assure that immigrants are working with professionals. He said they would know the scope of the work performed by the service provider, have assurances that the right work is being done and have recourse if they are wronged in the process.

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