CITY OF LOS ANGELES

Westlake South Neighborhood Council Governing Board Officers:

> Nelson A. Castillo, Esq. President

> > Michael R. Barnes Vice-President

> > > Randy Waller Secretary

James P. Harrell III Treasurer



Westlake South Neighborhood Council Concejo Vecinal Westlake Sur 1808 W. 7th Street P.O. Box 17688 Los Angeles, CA 90017

Westlake South Neighborhood Council Governing Board Members:

Michael R. Barnes Nelson A, Castillo Jorge A. Garcia James P. Harrell III Randy Waller Steve M. Kim

Philip Laventure Manuel Olmos Anthony Tucker

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BY HAND

July 19, 2013

Honorable Herb J. Wesson. Jr., Council President and Councilmember District 10 Los Angeles City Council 200 N. Spring St., Room 430 Los Angeles, CA 90012

Honorable Gilbert A. Cedillo Councilmember District 1 Los Angeles City Council 200 N. Spring St., Room 470 Los Angeles, CA 90012

Honorable Paul Koretz Councilmember District 5 Los Angeles City Council 200 N. Spring St., Room 440 Los Angeles, CA 90012

Honorable Curren D. Price. Jr., Councilmember District 9 Los Angeles City Council 200 N. Spring St., Room 420 Los Angeles, CA 90012

Honorable Mitchell Englander, Council President Pro Tempore and Councilmember District 12 Los Angeles City Council 200 N. Spring St., Room 405 Los Angeles, CA 90012

Honorable Paul Krekorian Councilmember District 2 Los Angeles City Council 200 N. Spring St., Room 435 Los Angeles, CA 90012

Honorable Felipe Fuentes Councilmember District 7 Los Angeles City Council 200 N. Spring St., Room 455 Los Angeles, CA 90012

Honorable Mike Bonin Councilmember District 11 200 N. Spring St., Room 475 Los Angeles City Council Los Angeles, CA 90012

Honorable Tom LaBonge Assistant Council President Pro Tempore and Councilmember District 4 Los Angeles City Council 200 N. Spring St., Room 480 Los Angeles, CA 90012

Honorable Bob Blumenfield Councilmember District 3 Los Angeles City Council -200 N. Spring St., Room 415 Los Angeles, CA 90012

Honorable Bernard Parks Councilmember District 8 Los Angeles City Council 200 N. Spring St., Room 460 Los Angeles, CA 90012

Honorable Mitch O'Farrell Councilmember District 13 200 N. Spring St., Room 450 Los Angeles City Council Los Angeles, CA 90012

Honorable Members of the Los Angeles City Council Re: C.F. 13-0131; C.F. 13-0131-S1; and C.F. 13-0002-S12 July 19, 2013
Page 2 of 3

Honorable Jose Huizar Councilmember District 14 Los Angeles City Council 200 N. Spring St., Room 465 Los Angeles, CA 90012

Honorable Joe Buscaino Councilmember District 15 Los Angeles City Council 200 N. Spring St., Room 410 Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: C.F. 13-0131; C.F. 13-0131-S1; and C.F. 13-0002-S12

Dear Honorable Members of the Los Angeles City Council:

My name is Nelson A. Castillo and I am the president of the Westlake South Neighborhood Council (WSNC). We help represent approximately 30,000 residents in the Westlake area.

I write on behalf of the WSNC to thank you for the work you do on behalf of the residents of the City of Los Angeles. I especially would like to thank Councilmember Gil Cedillo for the work he will do on behalf of the residents of Council District 1, and the residents of Westlake South in particular. The Westlake South area has many challenges and opportunities and the WSNC looks forward to working with the Los Angeles City Council (Council) to help the residents of Westlake South.

The WSNC is also grateful to the Council for re-establishing the Office of Immigrant Affairs (OIA). See C.F. 13-0131 and C.F. 13-0131-S1. Westlake South has a large immigrant community and it is of great interest to us that the OIA accomplishes the important tasks that have been entrusted to it by the Council. We ask the Council to work with Mayor Garcetti in ensuring the success of the OIA by providing it with the necessary funding and staff. The Council should also work with Mayor Garcetti in ensuring that a diverse group of individuals who are knowledgeable about immigrant issues are appointed to serve on the commission that will oversee the OIA.

On June 27, 2013, the U.S. Senate passed a bi-partisan comprehensive immigration reform bill. This historic piece of legislation has raised the hopes of many. The WSNC is grateful to the Council for supporting and advocating for "federal comprehensive immigration reform that creates a pathway towards citizenship for law-abiding, tax paying immigrant workers and their families; reduces immigration backlogs; offers opportunity for immigrant students to pursue a college education; promotes civil integration; and implements enforcement measures in a humane manner." See C.F. 13-0002-S12.

Unfortunately, already there are individuals out there seeking to profit from immigrants telling them that they can immediately obtain lawful status in the United Sates because of the U.S. Senate immigration bill. These unscrupulous individuals ask immigrants to pay them money for a service that cannot be accomplished at this time. Please see attached articles from *La Opinión* and the *California Bar Journal* for more background.

Honorable Members of the Los Angeles City Council Re: C.F. 13-0131; C.F. 13-0131-S1; and C.F. 13-0002-S12 July 19, 2013
Page 3 of 3

On behalf of the WSNC, I ask the Council to do everything in its power to continue to serve and protect the immigrant community living in the City of Los Angeles, including asking law enforcement agencies to proactively investigate and prosecute those that seek to defraud immigrants and engage in the unauthorized practice of law. The Council should also publicly support and fund law enforcement efforts that seek to serve and protect immigrants.

The WSNC stands ready, willing and able to assist the Council and the Office of Immigrant Affairs in serving and protecting immigrants in the City of Los Angeles. We are available to meet with you to discuss ways to work together to address these important issues.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I can be reached at 213-537-8472 or nelson@westlakesouthne.org should you have any questions.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Kelson a. Castillo

Sincerely.

Nelson A. Castillo, Esq.

President, Westlake South Neighborhood Council

Attachments

ce: WSNC Board Members

Honorable Eric Garcetti, Los Angeles City Mayor Honorable Michael Feuer, Los Angeles City Attorney

Honorable Jackie Lacey, Los Angeles County District Attorney

Terrie J. Coady, Esq., Public Liaison, Office of the Los Angeles County District Attorney

Honorable Kamala Harris, California Attorney General Patrick M. Kelly, Esq., State Bar of California President

Luis Rodriguez, Esq., State Bar of California Vice-President

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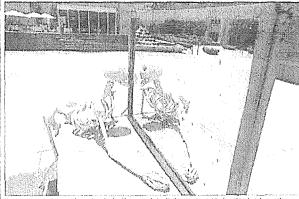
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Immigration debate has attorneys on alert for fraud

By Psyche Pascual Staff Writer

Although Congress is still shaping a workable immigration reform package, experts say communities are already seeing signs of what could develop into a torrent of immigration fraud in California.

Lawmakers are still debating legislation that would prevent people from coming to the United States illegally and offer citizenship to some 11 million immigrants already living here without authorization. But many fear that unscrupulous immigration consultants, who sometimes call themselves notarios, are using the hope of its passage to prey on immigrants seeking legal help. They urge lawyers to be prepared.

"We're already hearing these anecdotal complaints that consumers are being asked to pay to get on a waiting list so they can get to the front of the line," said Rigo Reyes, chief of investigations for Los Angeles County's Department of Consumer Affairs, which investigates complaints about notarios. Reyes was part of a group of attorneys and law enforcement agencies that met at State Bar offices in Los Angeles in March to discuss efforts to limit what could be a rising tide of immigration fraud. Attorneys "may be having to clean up the mess that somebody else creates."

For decades, immigration consultants have advertised their services as "notarios." A "notario publico" is a Spanish term used in some Latin American countries to describe people who have received training that is similar or equivalent to a law license and can represent others in government proceedings. They bill themselves as experts in immigration, tax preparation, family law and other matters. Under California law, notarios can help immigrants with translating and submitting forms, but they can't appear in court or give legal advice or they could be prosecuted for the unauthorized practice of law.

But many have complained for years that notarios illegally practice law. They often promise to get political asylum or citizenship for clients who don't qualify. Some even charge fees that are higher than those of immigration lawyers. Since legislation was introduced in Congress, many notarios have actually stepped up their activities, said Reid Trautz, director of American Immigration Lawyers Association's (AILA) practice and professionalism center in Washington D.C.

In fact, on the day the bill was introduced in the Capitol, Trautz said, "there was a notary handing out flyers saying 'Get in line and take advantage of the new law' even though the law hadn't been passed. We know this is happening. We hear from members this is growing in anticipation [of immigration reform]."

Trautz said attorneys who work with immigrant clients can make sure they are ready for the scams to come. Here's a list of what they can do:

Learn about what notarios can and can't do. Under California law, immigration consultants can help consumers fill out paperwork by translating and submitting forms. They are required to give clients a written contract, register and file a \$50,000 bond with the Secretary of State. Anyone can check on an immigration consultant's bond online at http://www.sos.ca.gov/business/sf/bond_search/ or call 916-653-3984.

Stock up on information about notarios and other types of immigration fraud for consumers and attorneys. Various organizations, including California's Office of the Attorney General, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS), U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC), AILA and the American Bar Association all have websites that describe notario fraud and how to prevent it. Much of the material is on the web:

- The state Office of the Attorney General has information on immigration consultants in seven languages on its website.
- The FTC also has information about immigration fraud on its website, including a wallet-sized card detailing how to spot scams that target immigrants.
- The CIS website has brochures and posters in 14 languages that describe immigration scams and can be downloaded.
- The American Bar Association, as part of its "Fight Notario Fraud" campaign has training materials, case law and other resources for attorneys on its website.
- As part of its Stop Notario Fraud campaign, AILA has a list of state immigration laws, lists of disciplined consultants
 on its website and state-by-state definitions of the unauthorized practice of law.

Help consumers document and report immigration fraud to the authorities. Authorities urge lawyers to help immigrants report scams, particularly when they lose money. But many immigrants are afraid to report fraud because they fear being deported. By acting as a go-between immigrants and authorities, "attorneys can reassure them and help them write a statement about the fraud," said Reyes, the chief consumer affairs investigator with Los Angeles County. "The authorities are willing to work with people no matter what immigration status is."

Once the person has written a statement, complaints of immigration fraud can be filed with local district attorneys' offices or with the state Attorney General's office through its online consumer complaint form. Complaints can also be filed with the FTC by going to http://ftc.gov/complaint or calling 877-382-4357.

Be on the watch for those committing fraud. Immigration consultants are also required to post signs in their offices and in advertisements stating they are not lawyers. But immigration experts said they know of consultants who say they can do more.

"Once a week we'll see some papers that were poorly prepared or incorrect," said Mary Beth Kaufman, a San Francisco attorney and vice chairwoman of Northern California chapter of AILA.

In one recent case, a couple came to Kaufman after losing money to notario who promised to file documents for citizenship for the wife. After months of silence from the immigration consultant, they finally demanded their paperwork back, but lost money. Yet they never filed a complaint for fear of being deported. Kaufman now keeps track of immigration consultants who have committed fraud, "so we know who they are," she said.