



For Immediate Release

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MADIGAN FILES LAWSUIT AGAINST BUSINESS THAT TARGETED POLISH AND HISPANIC SPEAKING CONSUMERS TO PROVIDE SERVICES

Chicago – Attorney General Lisa Madigan today filed a lawsuit against a Cook County business that allegedly targeted Polish and Hispanic speaking consumers with promises of providing various low-cost services of a personal and legal nature, including claims that the company was working with the Office of the Attorney General when it in fact was being investigated by the office.

Madigan’s complaint, filed today in Cook County Circuit Court, names as defendants the Belmont Central United American Neighborhood Association, an Illinois not for profit corporation that was dissolved on April 1, 2006, and Mark Ciotuszynski, individually and in his capacity as president of Belmont.

According to the three-count complaint, since at least September 2003, the defendants, claiming to be a “social service provider,” advertised, offered and sold various legal and personal services, including immigration assistance, credit repair, the collection of unpaid wages, bankruptcy and divorce assistance, personal injury and workers compensation assistance and help with Medicare and Medicaid issues. The defendants allegedly targeted Polish and Hispanic speaking consumers, advertising on television and the radio, in papers and signs posted in their storefront windows. Although the business’ solicitations stated that they were “not a law firm and do not practice law,” the services they provides were traditionally legal in nature.

“This business took advantage of consumers who needed legal services but instead received little or nothing for the hard-earned dollars they paid,” Madigan said.

According to Madigan’s complaint, consumers contacted and met with the defendants with the belief that the defendants could assist them for significantly less than a law firm. After paying various amounts of money, they were told that the business would begin working on their cases immediately. However, after signing a contract, consumers were often told they needed to pay more for the service or that an attorney needed to be hired, when in fact, the defendants never turned over most cases to an attorney. In some cases, the defendants simply failed to do any work as promised and failed to return the consumer’s money.

Madigan noted that the business also played upon consumers' hopes of becoming citizens by falsely representing to consumers that they were qualified to assist them with various immigration-related services and that they had a special relationship with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). The company failed to register with Madigan's office as an immigration services provider and post a bond, as required by law.

Ironically, Belmont also represented that they were working with the Office of the Attorney General and charged fees to fill out free forms when in fact the company was being investigated by Madigan's office.

As of this time, the defendants have failed and refused to refund monies to consumers for services not performed and in some instances have failed to return to consumers original documents they turned over when applying for assistance.

Madigan's complaint charges Belmont with violations of the Consumer Fraud and Deceptive Practices Act for the practices described above and seeks an injunction to prevent Belmont from doing business. The complaint also charges the defendants with violations of Section 2AA of the Consumer Fraud and Deceptive Business Practices Act for offering immigration services when they were not qualified to do so and seeks an injunction and civil penalties. Finally, the complaint charges the defendants with violations of the Credit Services Organization Act for charging and receiving money to improve a consumer's credit rating without having obtained a surety bond; making untrue or misleading representations to consumers regarding the amount of credit improvement the consumer can expect as a result of the services; and failing to provide consumers with the proper notice of their three-day right to cancel. Again, the complaint seeks an injunction and civil penalties.

Madigan's suit also seeks to compel Ciotuszynski to turn over documents pursuant to a subpoena, asks the court to declare all contracts between the company and consumers void and order restitution for consumers.

"This company jeopardized consumers by representing that they could help them with legal problems that needed an attorney's attention," Madigan said. "While they claimed to be a social service provider, they allegedly provided nothing but fraud and disappointment."

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