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ATTORNEY GENERAL SUES DECEPTIVE IMMIGRATION SERVICES PRACTICE FOR FAILURE TO PROVIDE PROMISED SERVICES

Chicago - Attorney General Lisa Madigan today filed a lawsuit in Cook County Circuit Court against a Chicago-based immigration services provider for accepting nearly \$140,000 from Illinois consumers but failing to fulfill promises to help them obtain permanent residency or U.S. citizenship.

"This is a fly-by-night operation that went to great lengths to convince people that they would help them navigate the immigration process," Madigan said. "Instead, this company took advantage of that trust, took their money and - in the end -left consumers with less time and money to effectively resolve their immigration problems."

Madigan's lawsuit alleges that Juanita Mendez, also known as Juanita Cruz and Juanita Sanchez, and her associate, Melesio Reyes, run an immigration services practice in Chicago. The lawsuit claims that Mendez and Reyes charge consumers between \$3,000 and \$10,000 for immigration services that they never perform and use a variety of misleading and deceptive tactics to convince consumers that the government is considering their requests for permanent residency or U.S. citizenship.

According to the lawsuit, the defendants deceive customers into believing that Mendez is an employee of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (U.S.C.I.S.), or a licensed attorney or, at other times, a Cook County Sheriff. In addition, the defendants have falsely informed some customers that can obtain legal status in the United States through the delayed amnesty program if they have lived in the United States for more than 10 years, are at least 32 years old and do not have a criminal record. The program however, is only available to approximately 350,000 immigrants who were illegally denied the right to apply for legal immigration status in 1986 and 1987.

The defendants' tactics also include falsifying and mailing government immigration documents to consumers to mislead them into believing that a pending interview with immigration officials is scheduled. On the morning of the so-called interviews, consumers are told that the appointments have been cancelled. In other instances, the defendants send falsified documents to consumers, informing them that visa numbers are unavailable but immigration officials have noted their application. The defendants also have falsely assured consumers that if U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) detained the consumers, the defendants would dispatch an attorney to have them released.

Madigan's suit asks the court to enter a permanent injunction barring Mendez and Reyes from providing immigration services in Illinois. The lawsuit also asks the court to order the defendants to pay restitution to consumers, civil penalties of \$50,000 for violating the Consumer Fraud Act, and an additional \$50,000 for each violation committed with the intent to defraud.

Assistant Attorneys General Cecilia Abundis and Sarah Alipourian Poulimas are handling the case for Madigan's Consumer Fraud Bureau.

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