



June 9, 2011

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## ATTORNEY GENERAL MADIGAN FILES IMMIGRATION FRAUD CASES

### *Madigan Joins FTC Initiative in Combating Immigration Services Scams*

Chicago – Attorney General Lisa Madigan today filed two lawsuits against Chicago area immigration servicers for accepting more than \$30,000 from consumers but failing to help them with their immigration status. Madigan, along with the Federal Trade Commission, filed the suits as part of a national crackdown against illegal immigration service providers found to have defrauded consumers across the country.

Madigan filed suit in Cook County Circuit Court against Martha Fernandez, of West Chicago, and Corriane Chairez, of Chicago, and filed a second lawsuit in McHenry County Circuit Court against Calvin Meziere, of Huntley, for using a variety of misleading and deceptive tactics to convince consumers that the government was considering their requests for a work permit, permanent residency or U.S. citizenship.

“The immigration process is often intimidating and confusing, which is why many people seek assistance,” Attorney General Madigan said. “But unfortunately, much of the help offered is expensive and illegitimate. That’s why it’s so important to know the warning signs of an immigration scam and where to find honest assistance.”

In her suit against Meziere, the Attorney General alleges the defendant duped a group of immigrant workers in 2009 into paying him large upfront fees to help them obtain work permits and thus the ability to travel freely in and out of the United States. Madigan alleges Meziere charged the consumers for credit checks, improving their bad credit history and for fake citizenship exams – all steps he falsely claimed were necessary to gain a permit. Consumers reported to Madigan’s office losing at least \$25,000 to Meziere in the scheme.

Madigan’s suit against Fernandez and Chairez alleges they conspired to solicit upfront fees based on promises of helping two immigrants with their immigration paperwork, charging them more than \$10,000 for work that was never completed. Despite Fernandez’s promises of a refund, it never arrived.

The Attorney General is asking the court to enter a permanent injunction against the three defendants barring them 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 Andrew Dougherty and Vivian Velasco Paz are handling the case for Madigan’s Consumer Fraud Bureau.

Attorney General Madigan urged the public to learn how to identify potential immigration scams and find legitimate sources for help with the immigration process. By state law, immigration service providers should:

- Provide you with a written contract in English and your native language
- Provide you with a three-day right to cancel your contract
- Return all documents to you upon demand
- Register with the Illinois Attorney General’s office

Finally, immigration service providers may not provide legal advice or accept fees for legal advice unless they are licensed attorneys. To check the status of a service provider or to file a complaint, please call the Attorney General’s office at:

Chicago 1-800-386-5438

Springfield 1-800-243-0618

Carbondale 1-800-243-0607

Spanish-language Hotline: 1-866-310-8398

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[Return to June 2011 Press Releases](#)

