



October 14, 2011

MADIGAN SUES WAUKEGAN WOMAN FOR IMMIGRATION FRAUD

Chicago — Attorney General Lisa Madigan today filed suit against a Waukegan woman for fraudulently posing as a licensed attorney to immigrants seeking help with their status. Madigan said the defendant's illegal practices cheated immigrants out of their upfront payments and put them at risk for deportation.

Madigan filed the lawsuit in Lake County Circuit Court alleging Margaret Carrasco went to great lengths to mislead immigrants that she was a licensed attorney able to assist them by representing them at immigration hearings and helping with document preparation.

"Because the immigration process is so complex and consumers are often desperate for help, the environment is ripe for scam artists," Attorney General Madigan said. "This defendant completely misled consumers who needed help, taking their money and putting them at great risk for deportation."

Since at least 2006, Madigan said Carrasco deceived consumers into believing she was permitted to practice immigration law. Carrasco posted law-related certificates and degrees in her office and handed out business cards that touted her schooling at Loyola University's School of Law, though she is not licensed to practice law in Illinois. She also falsely claimed to be a member of The Chicago Bar Association and American Immigration Lawyers Association. Likewise, Madigan said Carrasco told immigrant clients she was a notary public, which in many parts of Latin America refers to a person who practices law.

Madigan's lawsuit alleges Carrasco charged consumers upfront fees that far exceeded lawful amounts allowed under the Consumer Fraud Act and Immigration Services Rules. Carrasco also failed to register with Madigan's Office as an immigration service provider as required by law.

To date, two attorneys and two consumers have filed complaints with the Attorney General's office, and more than a dozen community members have expressed their concerns about Carrasco's services at community outreach events by the Attorney General's office.

Madigan said a consumer being detained in the McHenry County Jail paid Carrasco \$500 upfront for help in court with his immigration status, but she later failed to respond to his attempts to contact her. Another consumer, after months of alleged help in court with his immigration status and \$200 paid to Carrasco, was informed by a judge during an immigration court proceeding that Carrasco was not in fact a licensed attorney.

The lawsuit is asking the court to ban Carrasco from the business of immigration service in Illinois and obtain restitution for affected consumers. Madigan is also asking the court to impose civil penalties on Carrasco of \$50,000 for violating the Consumer Fraud Act, an additional \$50,000 for each violation committed with the intent to defraud and an additional \$10,000 for each violation committed against a person 65 years or older.

Attorney General Madigan urged consumers to learn how to identify potential immigration scams. By state law, Madigan said immigration service providers should:

- Provide a written contract in English and in an applicant's native language;
- Provide a three-day right to cancel a contract;
- Return all documents upon demand; and
- Register with the Illinois Attorney General's Office.

Madigan instructed consumers who believe they may have been the victim of a scam to contact her Consumer Fraud Hotline, (800) 386-5438, and (866) 310-8398 for Spanish speakers.

Assistant Attorney General Vivian Velasco Paz is handling this case for Madigan's Consumer Fraud Bureau.

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