

STATE OF NEW YORK

8074

2017-2018 Regular Sessions

IN ASSEMBLY

May 25, 2017

Introduced by M. of A. ORTIZ -- read once and referred to the Committee on Economic Development

AN ACT to amend the general business law, in relation to immigration assistance services

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

1 Section 1. Section 460-a of the general business law, as amended by
2 chapter 206 of the laws of 2014, is amended to read as follows:

3 § 460-a. Definitions and applicability. For the purpose of this arti-
4 cle the following terms shall have the following meanings:

5 1. "Immigrant assistance service" means providing assistance, for a
6 fee or other compensation, to persons who have, or plan to, come to the
7 United States from a foreign country, or their representatives, in
8 relation to any proceeding, filing or action affecting the non-immi-
9 grant, immigrant or citizenship status of a person which arises under
10 the immigration and nationality law, executive order or presidential
11 proclamation, or which arises under actions or regulations of the United
12 States [~~citizenship and immigration services, the United States~~] depart-
13 ment of homeland security, the United States department of justice, the
14 United States department of labor, or the United States department of
15 state.

16 2. "Provider" means any person, including but not limited to a corpo-
17 ration, partnership, limited liability company, sole proprietorship or
18 natural person, that provides immigrant assistance services, but shall
19 not include (a) any person duly admitted to practice law in this state
20 and any person working directly under the supervision of the person
21 admitted; (b) any not-for-profit tax exempt organization that provides
22 immigrant assistance without a fee or other payment from individuals or
23 at nominal fees as defined by the [~~federal board of immigration appeals~~]
24 United States department of justice, and the employees of such organiza-
25 tion when acting within the scope of such employment; (c) any tax

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets
[-] is old law to be omitted.

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1 ~~exempt, not-for-profit~~ organization recognized by the [~~federal board of~~
2 ~~immigration appeals~~] United States department of justice that provides
3 services via representatives accredited by [~~such board~~] the department
4 to appear before the United States citizenship and immigration services
5 and/or executive office for immigration review, that does not charge a
6 fee or charges nominal fees as defined by the [~~board of immigration~~
7 ~~appeals~~] department, and any duly accredited employee of such organiza-
8 tion acting within the scope of his or her employment; (d) any author-
9 ized agency under subdivision ten of section three hundred seventy-one
10 of the social services law and the employees of such organization when
11 acting within the scope of such employment; [~~or~~] (e) any individual
12 providing representation in an immigration-related proceeding under
13 federal law for which federal law or regulation establishes such indi-
14 vidual's authority to appear; or (f) any elected official who, acting
15 within the scope of his or her official capacity, without a fee or other
16 payment makes inquiries on behalf of an individual to any governmental
17 authority responsible for administering any program law or regulation
18 affecting the non-immigrant, immigrant or citizenship status of a
19 person.

20 § 2. Section 460-b of the general business law, as amended by chapter
21 206 of the laws of 2014, is amended to read as follows:

22 § 460-b. Immigrant assistance service contracts. 1. No immigrant
23 assistance service shall be provided until the customer has executed a
24 written contract with the immigrant assistant service provider. The
25 contract shall be in a language understood by the customer, either alone
26 or with the assistance of an [~~available~~] interpreter, and, if that
27 language is not English, an English language version of the contract
28 must also be provided. A copy of the contract shall be provided to the
29 customer immediately upon the customer's execution of the contract. The
30 interpreter shall provide an attestation affirming the accuracy of his
31 or her translation, to be attached to the contract.

32 2. (a) The customer has the right to cancel the contract within three
33 business days after his or her execution of the contract, without fee or
34 penalty. The right to cancel the contract within three days without
35 payment of any fee may be waived when services must be provided imme-
36 diately to avoid a forfeiture of eligibility or other loss of rights or
37 privileges, and the customer furnishes the provider with a separate
38 dated and signed statement, by the customer or his or her represen-
39 tative, describing the need for services to be provided within three
40 days and expressly acknowledging and waiving the right to cancel the
41 contract within three days.

42 (b) The contract may be cancelled at any time after execution. If the
43 contract is cancelled more than three days after [~~it was signed~~]
44 execution, or within three days after [~~it was signed~~] execution if the
45 right to cancel without fee has been waived, the provider may retain
46 fees for services rendered, and any additional amounts actually expended
47 on behalf of the customer. All other amounts must be returned to the
48 customer within fifteen days after cancellation.

49 3. The written contract shall be in plain language, in at least twelve
50 point [~~type~~] font and shall include the following:

51 (a) The name, address and telephone number of the provider.

52 (b) Itemization of all services to be provided to the customer, as
53 well as the fees and costs to be charged to the customer for each
54 service.

55 (c) A statement that original documents [~~required to be~~] submitted in
56 connection with an application for an immigration-related benefit made

1 to ~~[the United States citizenship and immigration services or for other~~
2 ~~certifications, benefits or services provided by government]~~ any govern-
3 mental entity, may not be retained by the ~~[immigrant assistance service]~~
4 provider for any reason, including failure of the customer to pay fees
5 or costs or other fee dispute.

6 (d) A statement that the provider shall give the customer a signed
7 form affirming receipt of each original document, as well as a complete
8 copy of such document, immediately upon taking possession of such
9 original document for submission or any other purpose.

10 (e) A statement that the provider shall give the customer a copy of
11 each document prepared with the provider's assistance.

12 ~~(f)~~ (f) A statement that the customer is not required to obtain
13 supporting documents through the immigrant assistance service provider,
14 and may obtain such documents himself or herself, along with the state-
15 ment: "The U.S. government provides information on required forms and
16 documentation for free online and by phone".

17 ~~(f)~~ (g) The statement: "You may cancel this contract at any time.
18 You have three (3) business days to cancel this contract without fee or
19 penalty and get back any fees that you have already paid. Notice of
20 cancellation may be made by completing the cancellation form included in
21 this contract, or otherwise notifying the provider in writing and deliv-
22 ering such form or notification to the provider in person or by United
23 States mail to (specify address). If you cancel this contract you will
24 get back any documents you submitted to the provider".

25 ~~(g)~~ (h) Each contract shall contain a separate final page titled
26 "Cancellation Form." The cancellation form shall contain the following
27 statement: "I hereby cancel the contract of (date of contract) between
28 (name of provider, address of provider, and phone number of provider)
29 and (name of customer)." Below the statement shall be a customer signa-
30 ture and date line. Below the signature and date line, the form shall
31 contain the statement required by paragraph ~~(h)~~ (i) of this subdivi-
32 sion, printed in twelve point font or larger ~~[text]~~.

33 ~~(h)~~ (i) A statement that the ~~[immigrant assistance service]~~ provider
34 has financial surety in effect for the benefit of any customer in the
35 event that the customer is owed a refund, or is damaged by the actions
36 of the provider, together with the name, address and telephone number of
37 the surety.

38 ~~(i)~~ (j) The statement: "The individual providing assistance to you
39 under this contract is not an attorney licensed to practice law or
40 accredited by the ~~[board of immigration appeals]~~ United States depart-
41 ment of justice to provide representation to you before ~~[the United~~
42 ~~States citizenship and immigration services, the department of homeland~~
43 ~~security, the executive office for immigration review, the department of~~
44 ~~labor, the department of state]~~ the federal government or any immi-
45 gration ~~[authorities]~~ authority and may not give legal advice or accept
46 fees for legal advice. For a free legal referral call the office for new
47 Americans hotline at (phone number of the office for new Americans), the
48 New York state office of the attorney general at (phone number of the
49 office of the attorney general), or your local district attorney or
50 prosecutor." The service provider shall be responsible for providing the
51 ~~[accurate and up-to-date phone numbers required in such statement]~~ most
52 recent and accurate information required by this paragraph.

53 ~~(j)~~ (k) The statement: "The individual providing assistance to you
54 under this contract is prohibited from disclosing any of your personal
55 information ~~[about you]~~ to, or ~~[filing]~~ submitting any forms or docu-
56 ments on your behalf with, immigration or other authorities without your

1 knowledge and consent except as required by law." A provider shall
2 promptly notify the customer in writing when such provider has disclosed
3 any information to or filed any form or document with immigration or
4 other authorities when such disclosure or filing was required by law and
5 done without the knowledge and consent of the customer.

6 ~~[(+)]~~ (1) The statement: "A copy of all forms completed and documents
7 accompanying the forms shall be kept by the service provider for three
8 years. A copy of the customer's file shall be provided to the customer
9 on demand and without fee."

10 ~~[(+)]~~ (m) On the same page as the signature line, the statement: "The
11 individual providing assistance to you under the terms of this contract
12 must explain the contents of this contract to you and answer any ques-
13 tions about it that you may have regarding the terms of this contract."

14 (n) Each contract shall contain the division of consumer's protections
15 publicly available "Consumer Bill of Rights" on a separate page. The
16 provider shall be responsible for providing the most recent version of
17 the document available on the division of consumer's protection website.

18 § 3. Section 460-c of the general business law, as amended by chapter
19 206 of the laws of 2014, is amended to read as follows:

20 § 460-c. Required notices. 1. Posting of signs. Every provider shall
21 post signs conspicuously, at every location where such provider meets
22 with customers, setting forth information in English and in every other
23 language in which the person provides or offers to provide immigrant
24 assistance services. There shall be a separate sign for each language,
25 and each shall be posted in a location where it will be visible to
26 customers.

27 (a) One sign shall be at least eleven inches by seventeen inches, and
28 shall contain the following in not less than sixty point ~~type~~ font:

29 "THE INDIVIDUAL PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO YOU UNDER THIS CONTRACT IS NOT
30 AN ATTORNEY LICENSED TO PRACTICE LAW OR ACCREDITED BY THE ~~[BOARD OF~~
31 ~~IMMIGRATION-APPEALS]~~ UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE TO PROVIDE
32 REPRESENTATION TO YOU BEFORE THE UNITED STATES CITIZENSHIP AND IMMI-
33 GRATION SERVICES, THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND
34 SECURITY, THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE FOR IMMIGRATION REVIEW, THE DEPARTMENT OF
35 LABOR, THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE OR ANY IMMIGRATION AUTHORITIES AND MAY
36 NOT GIVE LEGAL ADVICE OR ACCEPT FEES FOR LEGAL ADVICE. FOR A FREE LEGAL
37 REFERRAL CALL THE OFFICE FOR NEW AMERICANS HOTLINE AT (phone number of
38 the office for new Americans). TO FILE A COMPLAINT ABOUT AN IMMIGRANT
39 ASSISTANCE SERVICE PROVIDER CALL THE OFFICE FOR NEW AMERICANS HOTLINE AT
40 (phone number of the office for new Americans), THE NEW YORK STATE
41 OFFICE OF ATTORNEY GENERAL AT (phone number of the office of attorney
42 general), OR YOUR LOCAL DISTRICT ATTORNEY OR PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE AT
43 (phone number of the local district attorney in the county where the
44 provider provides services). The service provider shall be responsible
45 for providing the accurate and up-to-date phone numbers required on such
46 sign.

47 (b) A separate sign shall be posted in a location visible to customers
48 in conspicuous size type and which contains the schedule of fees for
49 services offered and the statement: "YOU MAY CANCEL ANY CONTRACT WITHIN
50 3 BUSINESS DAYS AND GET BACK YOUR DOCUMENTS AND ANY MONEY YOU PAID."

51 2. (a) Notice in advertisements. Every provider who advertises immi-
52 grant assistance services, whether by signs, pamphlets, newspapers, or
53 any other written communication shall post or otherwise include with
54 such advertisement a notice in the language in which the advertisement
55 appears. This notice shall be of a conspicuous size and shall state:
56 "THE INDIVIDUAL OFFERING TO PROVIDE IMMIGRANT ASSISTANCE SERVICES IS NOT

1 AN ATTORNEY LICENSED TO PRACTICE LAW OR ACCREDITED BY THE [~~BOARD OF~~
2 ~~IMMIGRATION APPEALS~~] UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE TO PROVIDE
3 REPRESENTATION BEFORE THE UNITED STATES CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION
4 SERVICES, THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, THE DEPARTMENT OF
5 JUSTICE, THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE FOR IMMIGRATION REVIEW, THE DEPARTMENT OF
6 LABOR, THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE OR ANY IMMIGRATION AUTHORITIES AND MAY
7 NOT GIVE LEGAL ADVICE OR ACCEPT FEES FOR LEGAL ADVICE."

8 (b) No advertisement for immigration assistance services may expressly
9 or implicitly guarantee any particular governmental action, including
10 but not limited to the granting of employment authorization, lawful
11 permanent resident status or citizenship.

12 § 4. Section 460-d of the general business law, as amended by chapter
13 206 of the laws of 2014, is amended to read as follows:

14 § 460-d. Prohibited acts. No provider shall:

15 1. Give any legal advice concerning an immigration matter, including
16 selecting, or advertising the customer on selecting a governmental agen-
17 cy form in order to apply for an immigration-related benefit, or other-
18 wise engage in the practice of law.

19 2. Assume, use or advertise the title of lawyer or attorney at law, or
20 equivalent terms in the English language or any other language, or
21 represent or advertise other titles or credentials, including but not
22 limited to "notary public", "accredited representative of the board of
23 immigration appeals," "notario public", "notario", "immigration special-
24 ist" or "immigration consultant," that could cause a customer to believe
25 that the person [~~possesses special professional skills or~~] is authorized
26 to provide advice on an immigration matter; provided that a notary
27 public licensed by the secretary of state may use the term "notary
28 public."

29 3. State or imply that the provider can or will obtain special favors
30 from or has special influence with the United States citizenship and
31 immigration services, the United States department of Homeland Security,
32 the executive office for Immigration review or any other governmental
33 entity.

34 4. Threaten to report the customer to immigration or other authorities
35 or threaten to undermine in any way the customer's immigration status or
36 attempt to secure lawful status.

37 5. Demand or retain any fees or compensation for services not
38 performed, services to be performed in the future, or costs that are not
39 actually incurred.

40 6. [~~Advise, direct or permit a customer to answer questions on a~~
41 ~~government document, or in a discussion with a government official, in a~~
42 ~~specific way where the provider knows or has reasonable cause to believe~~
43 ~~that the answers are false or misleading~~] Make a determination of, or
44 advise about, a person's immigration status, including advising him or
45 her on how to respond to questions on a governmental form regarding such
46 determination.

47 7. Disclose any information to, or file any forms or documents with,
48 immigration or other authorities on behalf of a customer without the
49 knowledge or consent of the customer except where required by law. A
50 provider shall promptly notify the customer in writing when such provid-
51 er has disclosed any information to or filed any form or document with
52 immigration or other authorities when such disclosure or filing was
53 required by law and done without the knowledge and consent of the
54 customer.

55 8. Fail to provide customers with copies of documents [~~filed with~~]
56 submitted to, or received from, a governmental entity within two weeks

1 of submission or receipt or refuse to return original documents supplied
2 by, prepared on behalf of, or paid for by the customer, upon the request
3 of the customer, or upon termination of the contract. Original documents
4 must be returned promptly upon request and upon cancellation of the
5 contract, even if there is a fee dispute between the [~~immigration~~
6 ~~assistance service~~] provider and the customer.

7 9. Fail to provide the customer with a signed form affirming receipt
8 of an original document, as well as a complete copy of such document,
9 immediately upon taking possession of such original document for
10 submission or any other purpose.

11 10. Make any misrepresentation or false statement, directly or indi-
12 rectly.

13 [~~10-~~] 11. Make any guarantee or promise to a customer, unless there is
14 a basis in fact for such representation, such representation does not
15 relate to eligibility for an immigration-related benefit, and the guar-
16 antee or promise is in writing and attached to the service contract.

17 [~~11-~~] 12. Represent that a fee may be charged, or charge a fee for the
18 distribution, provision or submission of an official document or form
19 issued or promulgated by a state or federal governmental entity, or for
20 a referral of the customer to another person or entity that is qualified
21 to provide services or assistance which the [~~immigrant assistance~~
22 ~~service~~] provider will not provide.

23 [~~12-~~] 13. For a fee or other compensation refer a customer to an
24 attorney or any other individual or entity that can provide services
25 that the [~~immigrant assistance service~~] provider cannot provide.

26 [~~13-~~] 14. Give advice on the determination of a person's immigration
27 status, including advising him or her as to answers on a government form
28 regarding such determination.

29 [~~14-~~] 15. Promise to expedite immigration or other immigration related
30 governmental benefit processes, through claims to have special relation-
31 ships with or special access to government employees who will expedite
32 applications or issue favorable decisions for any reason other than the
33 merits of the application.

34 [~~15. Knowingly provide misleading or false information to a noncitizen~~
35 ~~about his or her individual or family's eligibility for immigration~~
36 ~~benefits or status, or to noncitizens or citizens about their individual~~
37 ~~or family's eligibility for other government benefits, with the intent~~
38 ~~to induce an individual to employ the services of the service provider~~
39 ~~to obtain such immigration benefits or status, or such other government~~
40 ~~benefits.]~~

41 16. Provide information to any person about his or her, or his or her
42 family member's potential eligibility for a particular immigration-re-
43 lated benefit or status, or other governmental benefit, with the intent
44 to induce such person to employ the services of such provider, regard-
45 less of whether the information is true or false.

46 17. Disclose any information to, or submit any forms or documents
47 with, any third party, including immigration or other authorities, on
48 behalf of or relating to the customer without the knowledge and consent
49 of the customer except where such disclosure or such submission is
50 required by law. A provider shall notify the customer in writing when
51 such provider has disclosed any information to or submitted any form or
52 document with immigration or other authorities when such disclosure or
53 submission was required by law and performed without the knowledge and
54 consent of the customer.

55 § 5. Section 460-f of the general business law, as amended by chapter
56 206 of the laws of 2014, is amended to read as follows:

§ 460-f. Surety requirement. Every provider shall maintain in full force and effect for the entire period during which the provider provides immigrant assistance services and for one year after the provider ceased to do business as ~~[an immigrant assistance service]~~ a provider of immigration assistance services, a bond, contract of indemnity, or irrevocable letter of credit, payable to the people of the state of New York, in the principal amount of fifty thousand dollars; provided, however, that every provider that receives in excess of two hundred fifty thousand dollars in total fees and other compensation for providing immigrant assistance service during any twelve-month period shall maintain in full force and effect a bond, contract of indemnity, or irrevocable letter of credit, payable to the people of the state of New York, in the principal amount of twenty percent of such total fees and compensation. Such surety shall be for the benefit of any customer who does not receive a refund of fees from the provider to which he or she is entitled, or is otherwise injured by the provider. The attorney general on behalf of the customer or the customer in his or her own name, may maintain an action against the provider and the surety.

§ 6. The general business law is amended by adding four new sections 460-l, 460-m, 460-n and 460-o to read as follows:

§ 460-l. Reporting. 1. In conjunction with the division of immigration policies and affairs, the director of the division of consumer protection shall prepare and submit to the division of immigration policies and affairs, the governor, the temporary president of the senate, and the speaker of the assembly a report that includes the following information related to providers of immigration assistance services:

(a) the number of complaints received related to providers of immigration assistance services, disaggregated by source and type;

(b) the number of proactive investigations that do not stem from a complaint conducted by the division;

(c) the number of violations issued, disaggregated by type;

(d) the number of the violations issued that originated with a consumer complaint;

(e) the number of violations issued as a result of a proactive investigation by the division;

(f) the length of time the division required to investigate and determine whether to issue a violation for each complaint received;

(g) a description of the division's efforts to proactively investigate providers of immigration assistance services;

(h) a description of the division's efforts to collaborate with other law enforcement agencies on investigation, enforcement, and community education efforts; and

(i) a description of changing trends in the provision of services and common fraudulent schemes.

2. Such report shall be submitted on or before October first, two thousand seventeen and every six months thereafter until the year two thousand twenty, and shall include the information required by subdivision one of this section as it relates to the six month period prior to the submission of such report.

§ 460-m. Community outreach and education. In conjunction with the mayor's office of immigrant affairs, the department shall engage in community outreach and education efforts to raise awareness about topics including but not limited to common fraudulent schemes committed by providers of immigration assistance services and the department's complaint mechanisms and services.

1 § 460-n. Consumer bill of rights. a. In conjunction with the division
2 of immigration policies and affairs, the division of consumer protection
3 shall create a "Consumer Bill of Rights" for customers seeking assist-
4 ance from providers of immigration assistance services. Such bill of
5 rights shall be posted on the division's website in English, as well as
6 in the top six limited English proficiency languages spoken by the popu-
7 lation of the United States based on United States census data.

8 § 460-o. Severability. If any section, subsection, sentence, clause,
9 phrase or other portion of this article is, for any reason, declared
10 unconstitutional or invalid, in whole or in part, by any court of compe-
11 tent jurisdiction, such portion shall be deemed severable, and such
12 unconstitutionality or invalidity shall not affect the validity of the
13 remaining portions of this law, which shall continue in full force and
14 effect.

15 § 7. This act shall take effect immediately.