



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Governor Cuomo Signs Legislation to Protect New Yorkers From Immigration Assistance Fraud

RUBEN DIAZ August 6, 2014

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GOVERNOR CUOMO SIGNS LEGISLATION TO PROTECT NEW YORKERS FROM IMMIGRATION ASSISTANCE FRAUD

New law strengthens penalties for those who take advantage of immigrants and codifies the Office for New Americans, launched last year

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today signed legislation to better protect immigrants living in New York from potential fraud or wrongdoing as they seek immigration-related assistance. These new New Yorkers will now benefit from stricter assistance-provider requirements, including the addition of a new crime to discourage this type of fraud. This bill also designates the New York State Office for New Americans – which Governor Cuomo launched last year – as a permanent executive office of State government, whose primary purpose is to offer support to the immigrant population. Complementing the legislation

signed today, a statewide multilingual public service campaign is in progress to warn newcomers against fraud and encourage them to seek assistance if they feel they are a victim of an immigration-related scam.

“New York has a long history of welcoming immigrants from around the world, and today we are continuing that heritage with a new law that protects new New Yorkers and solidifies the services we provide,” Governor Cuomo said. “This bill will support those who come seeking a better future for their families, and I am proud to sign it into law today.”

The legislation will strengthen protections by enhancing translation requirements, increasing civil penalties for violations of the law, and barring the use of job titles that aim to mislead an assistance-seeker into believing that a service provider is an attorney or otherwise specialized professional when the provider has no such credential. It creates two new crimes, felony and misdemeanor immigration assistance fraud.

Additionally, the bill codifies the Office for New Americans, launched by the Governor in March 2013, which provides a range of services to New York’s recent immigration population. Just last year, the office helped over 34,000 people through neighborhood-based opportunity centers and a toll-free multi-lingual hotline (800-566-7636) offering a variety of services. The Opportunity Centers teach New Americans English, assist them in the process of becoming naturalized U.S. citizens, provide free legal advice so they can start and grow businesses, as well as offer training to community based organizations so that they may offer immigration services. The Office for New Americans is the first state-level immigrant office created by statute in the country.

Senator Rubén Díaz said, “When immigrants seek assistance on their path to becoming citizens, they need to be assured that the organizations that are providing the help will not take advantage of them. This new law sets clear standards for providers of immigration

assistance services and establishes strict penalties for those who violate the law. Immigrants who call New York State home finally will receive the protection they deserve as they seek to become citizens of our great country.”

Assemblyman Marcos A. Crespo, Chair of the Assembly Task Force on New Americans and author the Immigrant Assistance Service Enforcement Act, said, "Thanks to dedicated support of our Governor, it is no longer open season on immigrants in our State. This new law will help prevent immigrants from becoming victims of fraud, increases penalties on those that try to scam immigrants out of their life's savings, gives immigrants an opportunity to recover their stolen fees and for damages, meets federal criteria that allows recourse when the fraud has interfered with immigration matters, and permanently establishes the Office for New Americans with a clear mandate on the work it is to perform for years to come. Thanks to the support of Governor Cuomo, this is a major change in public policy that will positively impact over 4.3 million New Yorkers who are of recent foreign decent. Today, because of his commitment to improving the lives of all New Yorkers, countless hardships and crimes will be prevented for decades to come and even more opportunities to help immigrants integrate into our society will be created."

New York Secretary of State Cesar Perales said, “By empowering our communities through legitimate services, we not only provide needed assistance to a vulnerable population, we also create economic opportunities across the State that will eventually benefit every New Yorker. I congratulate the Governor for combatting immigration scams affecting our state’s newcomers.”

Steven Choi, Executive Director of the New York Immigration Coalition, said, "The New York Immigration Coalition applauds Governor Cuomo for signing into law the Immigrant Assistance Service Enforcement Act, a critical piece of legislation that empowers New York’s immigrant communities. We are proud to have worked closely with the Governor’s office

and Assemblymember Crespo in crafting a bill that provides new protections against immigration fraud, punishes those who seek to take advantage of immigrant communities, and lays a foundation to expand reliable immigration services across the State. We look forward to working with the Governor and the Office for New Americans to build on this legislation and ensure that New York is invested in immigrant communities that will pay off in benefits for our entire State.”

This law passed both houses of the legislature as S.6732-A and A.8947B, respectively.

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