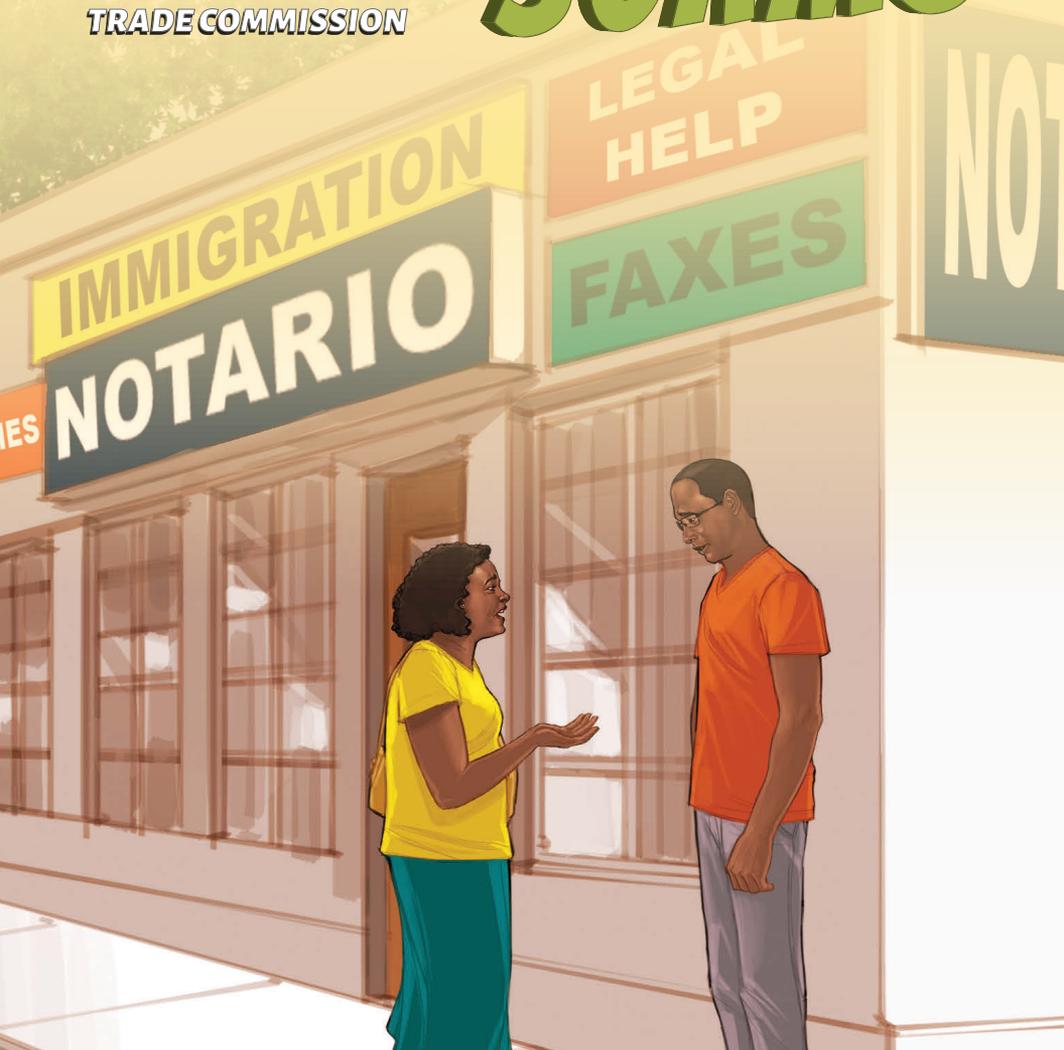


**HOW MIRIAM AND
PEDRO LEARNED ABOUT**

NOTARIO SCAMS

**A FOTONOVELA
FROM THE FEDERAL
TRADE COMMISSION**



HOW MIRIAM AND PEDRO LEARNED ABOUT NOTARIO SCAMS

ABOUT THE FTC

The Federal Trade Commission is the nation's consumer protection agency. Its mission is to protect consumers from fraudulent and deceptive practices.

This fotonovela is part of the FTC's ongoing efforts to help the Latino community avoid scams and stop fraud. For more information, visit consumer.ftc.gov/fotonovela.

Report fraud by calling 1-877-FTC-HELP or at ftc.gov/complaint.

A woman with curly hair, wearing a red top and brown pants, sits on a green folding chair. She is talking to a man with glasses, wearing a light blue shirt and dark pants, who is also on a green folding chair. They are at an outdoor table with a green top. On the table are two red drinks with straws and two tacos. In the background is a green taco stand with a sign that says "TACOS" and a picture of a taco. The scene is set outdoors with utility poles and a clear sky.

I need help with my immigration papers. I'm going to see the notario around the corner tomorrow.

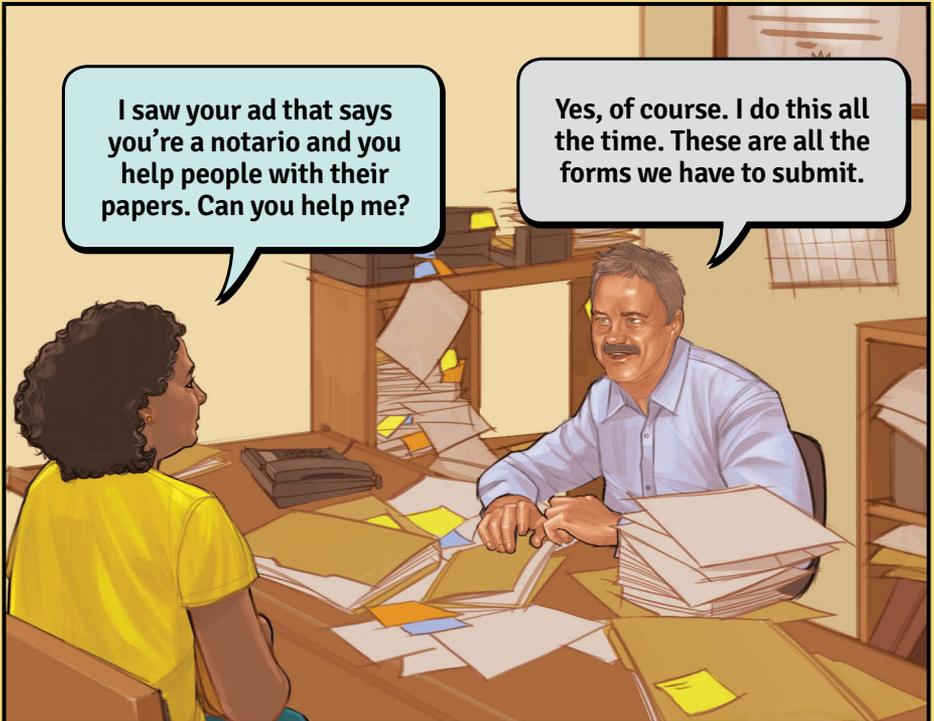
Congratulations. I also need to find someone who can help me. Let me know how it goes.

The next day, Miriam visits Mr. Ruiz who says he's a notario and can help with the immigration process.



I saw your ad that says you're a notario and you help people with their papers. Can you help me?

Yes, of course. I do this all the time. These are all the forms we have to submit.



Watch Out!



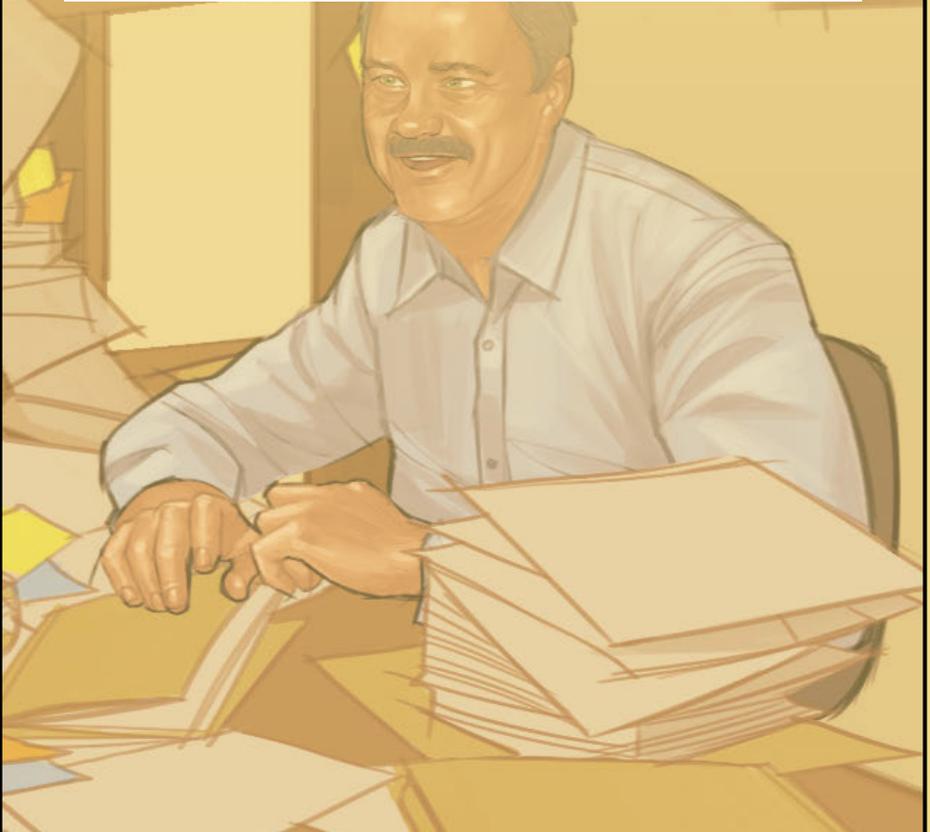
A notario, notario público, or notary public isn't an attorney and can't give you legal advice.



Notarios will take your money but won't help you. Sometimes, they hurt your chance to immigrate lawfully.



Only someone authorized by the U.S. government can give you legal advice about the immigration process.





Just sign these forms
then I'll fill them out
and submit them.

But they're blank.

It's okay. I have
your information,
I can fill them out.

Watch Out!



Never sign a blank immigration form or a form with false information.



Never pay for immigration forms. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) provides them for free. Call 1-800-870-3676, go to a USCIS office, or visit uscis.gov/forms.



Get immigration information from official U.S. government websites that end in [.gov](https://www.gov/). Some sites that look official but don't end in [.gov](https://www.gov/) might charge you for forms.



At work the next week, Pedro and Miriam catch up.

How did your meeting with the notario go?

Okay, I guess. I paid him and he said he'd work on my application.

My neighbor knows a lot about the immigration process and offered to help me with my forms.

Really? Are you sure she knows what she's doing?



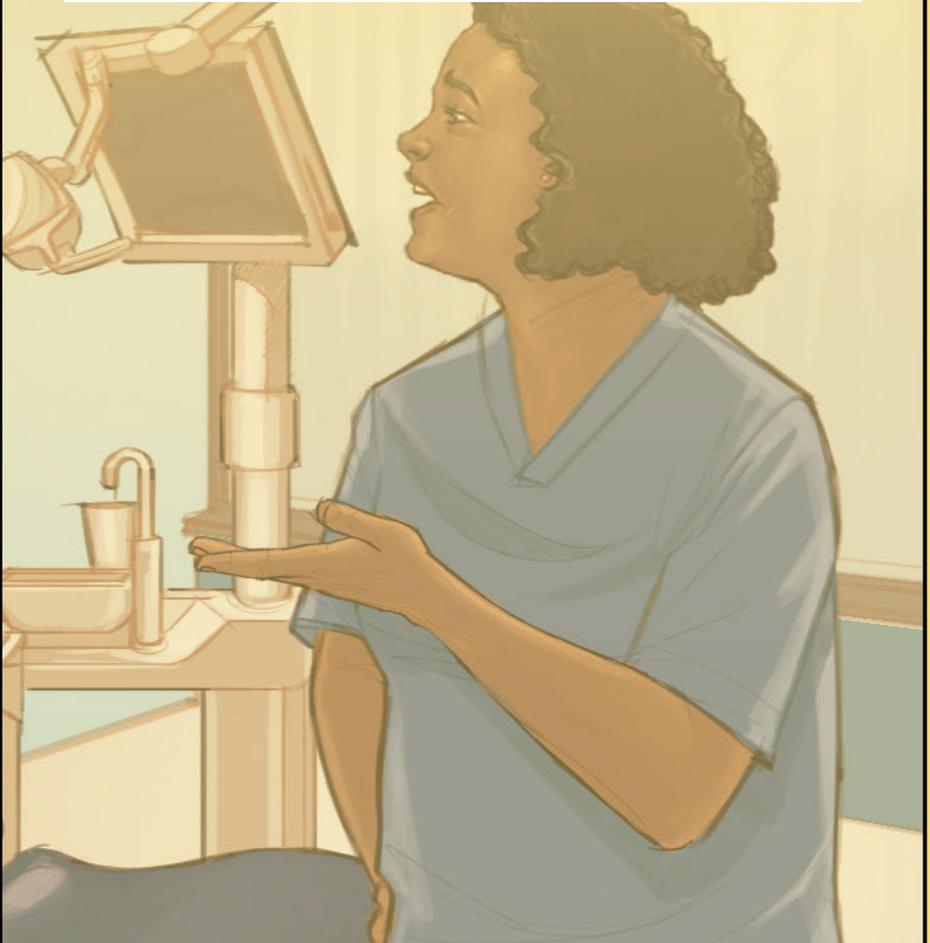
Watch Out!



People who mean well, like a friend, a family member, or a teacher, can cause problems for you later.



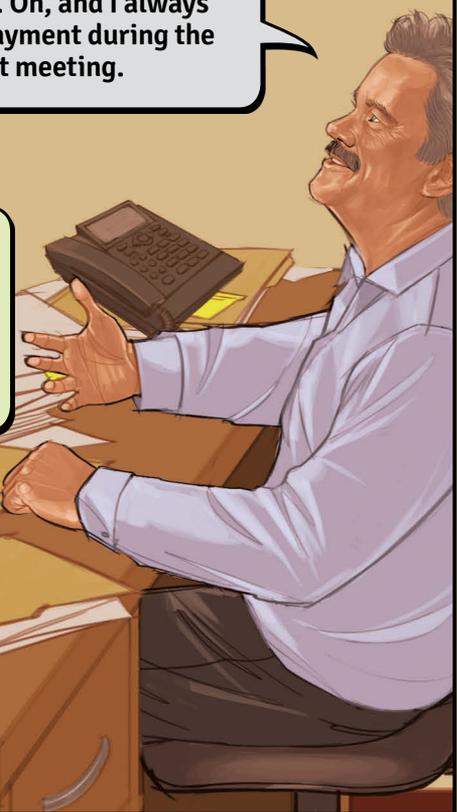
A friend can only write what you tell them to. They can't tell you what to say or which forms to use.



Worried that his neighbor might not be able to help, Pedro decides to see Mr. Ruiz because he thinks a notario must know more than his neighbor.



Hi, I'm Pedro. My cousin Miriam says you can help me with my immigration papers.



I'd be happy to. Just leave me your birth certificate and passport. I'll get started today and will update you next week. Oh, and I always collect a payment during the first meeting.

Wait, I have to pay you now and leave my documents? I don't know. I'm going to think this over.

Watch Out!



Don't let anyone keep your original documents. Scammers might keep them and make you pay to get them back.



Notarios aren't attorneys and can't help you with the immigration process.



A few weeks later, Miriam and Pedro learn the truth about notario scams.

**Mr. Ruiz is a fraud!
He took my money and
never sent my application.
It turns out that he's not
even authorized to give me
immigration advice.**

**Oh no, I'm sorry. I'm
glad I didn't give him my
documents. How'd you
find out?**

**I went to a free legal clinic.
They told me the Federal Trade
Commission has tips to avoid
and report notario scams at
ftc.gov/immigration.**

Only someone authorized by the government—like a lawyer or an accredited representative—can give you legal advice.

A **lawyer** must be a member of the professional association in their state and may charge you a fee. To find an immigration lawyer, you can:

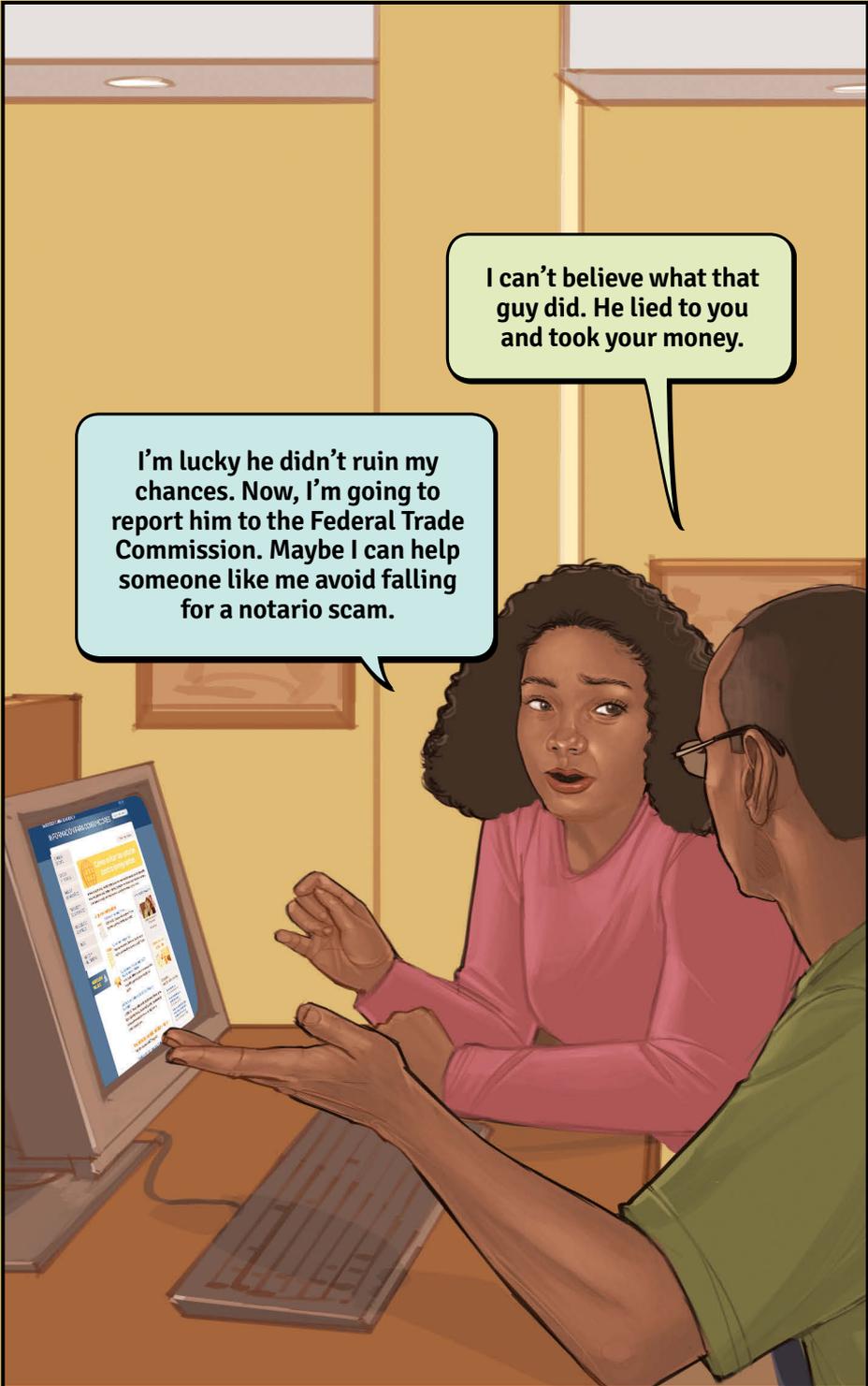
- contact USCIS at 1-800-375-5283 or uscis.gov/avoidscams.
- search the American Immigration Lawyers Association website at ailalawyer.com.

An **accredited representative**:

- is **not** a lawyer but **is** authorized to give immigration advice.
- must work for an organization recognized by the government. The organization might charge you a fee.

Learn more about how to find help at ftc.gov/immigration.





I can't believe what that guy did. He lied to you and took your money.

I'm lucky he didn't ruin my chances. Now, I'm going to report him to the Federal Trade Commission. Maybe I can help someone like me avoid falling for a notario scam.

A digital display screen, possibly from an airport or public building, showing a message about immigration scams. The screen is framed in a dark brown border. The text is centered and reads: "Immigration scams are against the law." followed by "Report them to the FTC at 1-877-382-4357 or ftc.gov/complaint." Below the screen, the words "EXIT" and "MENU" are faintly visible on the wall.

Immigration scams are against the law.

Report them to the FTC at
1-877-382-4357 or [ftc.gov/complaint](https://www.ftc.gov/complaint).

HOW TO AVOID AN IMMIGRATION SCAM

Don't go to a notario, notario público, or notary public for immigration help. Notarios:

- aren't lawyers and can't give you legal advice.
- will take your money but they won't help you.
- can hurt your chance to immigrate lawfully.

Forms and Documents

Never sign a blank form or a form with false information.

Don't pay for immigration forms. Get free forms at uscis.gov/forms, call 1-800-870-3676, or go to a USCIS office.

Don't let anyone keep your original documents.

Getting Help

Only someone authorized by the U.S. government—like a lawyer or an accredited representative—can give you legal advice. Learn more about how to find help at [ftc.gov/immigration](https://www.ftc.gov/immigration).

This fotonovela is part of the Federal Trade Commission's ongoing efforts to raise awareness about scams targeting the Latino community. The story offers information about avoiding notario scams.

**See all of the FTC's fotonovelas at
www.consumer.ftc.gov/fotonovela.**

Order free educational materials from the Federal Trade Commission at bulkorder.ftc.gov.

Sign up to get free scam alerts and other news at
ftc.gov/stay-connected.



May 2015