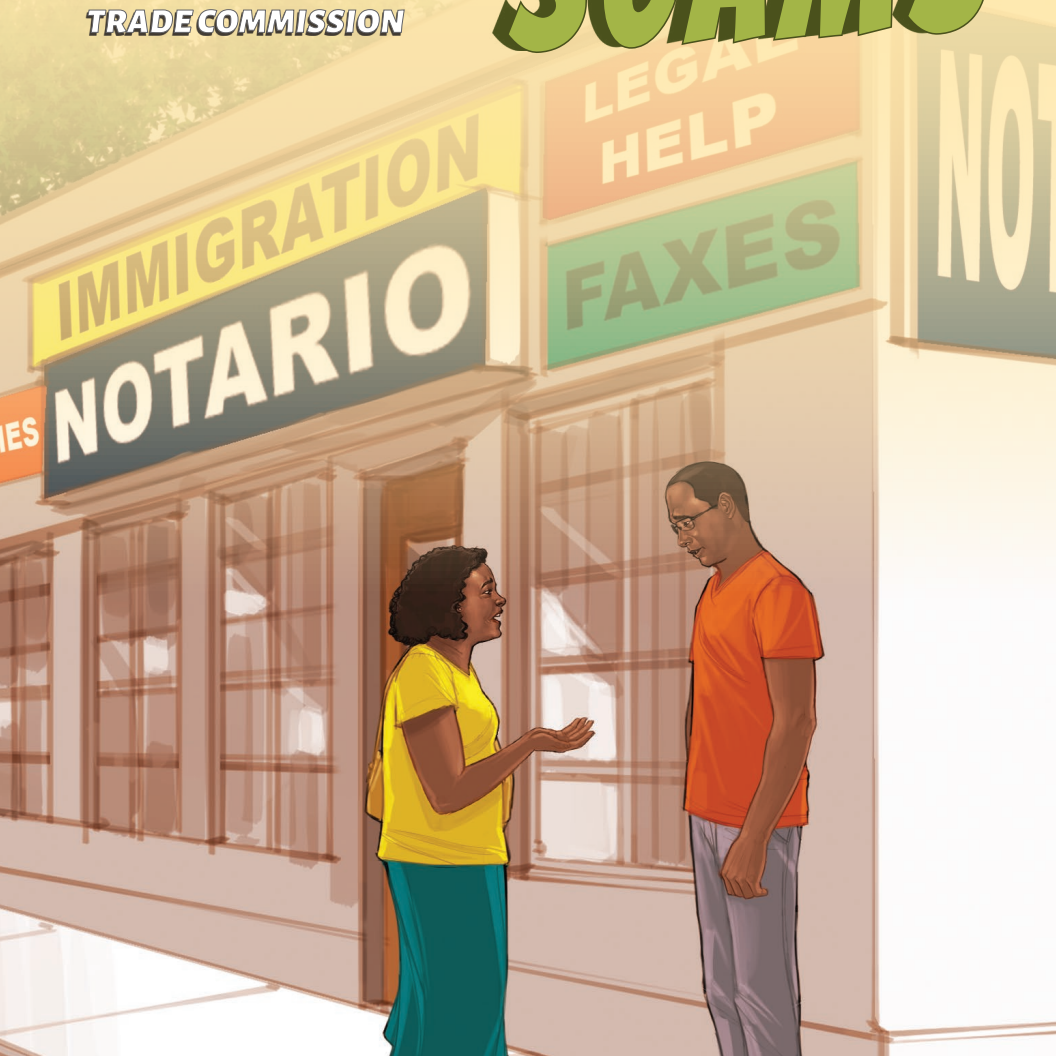


# HOW MIRIAM AND PEDRO LEARNED ABOUT NOTARIO SCAMS

A FOTONOVELA  
BY 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 all communities, including the Latino community, avoid scams and stop fraud. To read all the fotonovelas online and to order print copies in Spanish, visit [ftc.gov/graphicnovels](https://ftc.gov/graphicnovels). Report fraud by calling 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357) or at [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](https://ReportFraud.ftc.gov).



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

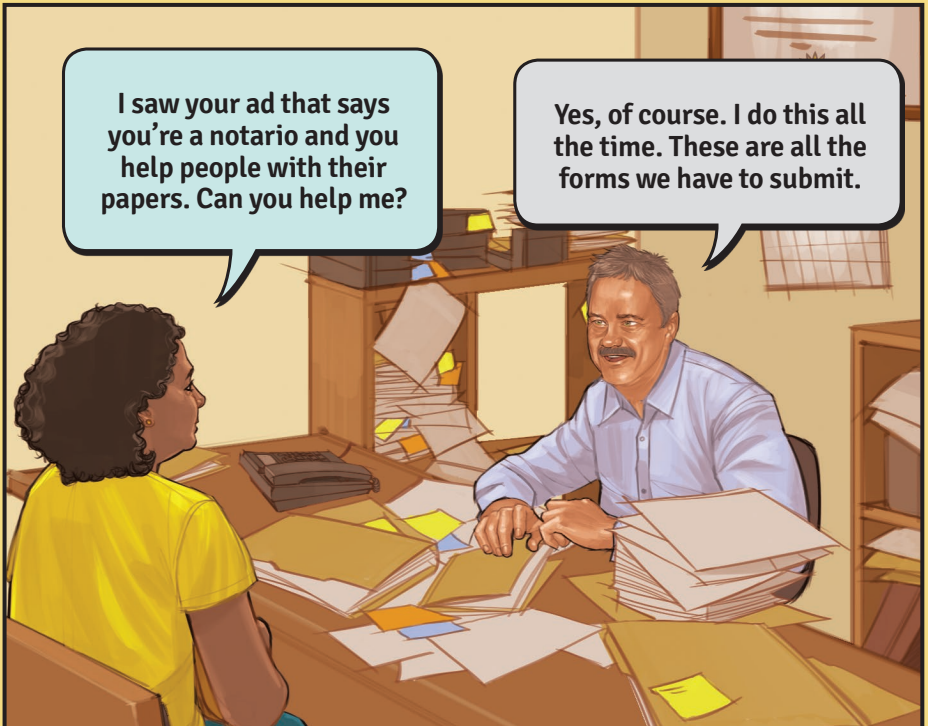
I also need to find someone who can help me. Let me know how it goes.

The next day, Myriam 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!



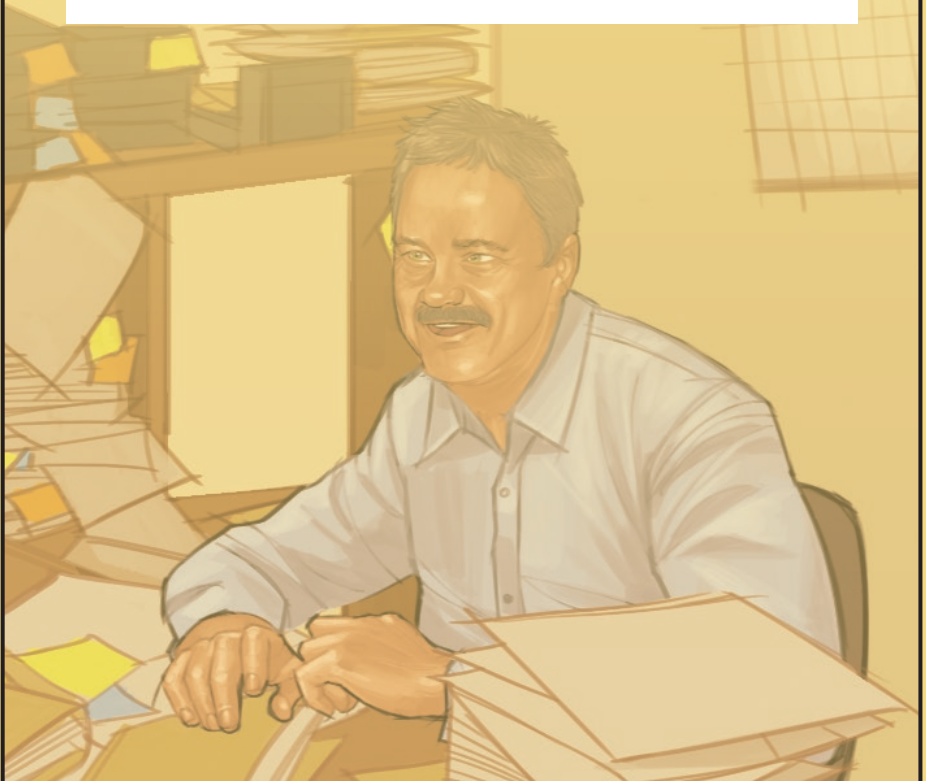
A notario or notario público isn't an attorney and can't give you legal advice.




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



Only an immigration attorney or an accredited representative working for an organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice can give you legal advice about the immigration process. Find out more at [ftc.gov/immigration](https://www.ftc.gov/immigration).







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 provides them for free. Call 1-800-375-5283870-3676, go to a USCIS office, or go to [uscis.gov](https://uscis.gov).



Stay away from websites that don't end in .gov or that charge you for forms – even if they look like an official website.



At work the next week, Pedro and Myriam 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 they know what they're doing?





## Watch Out!



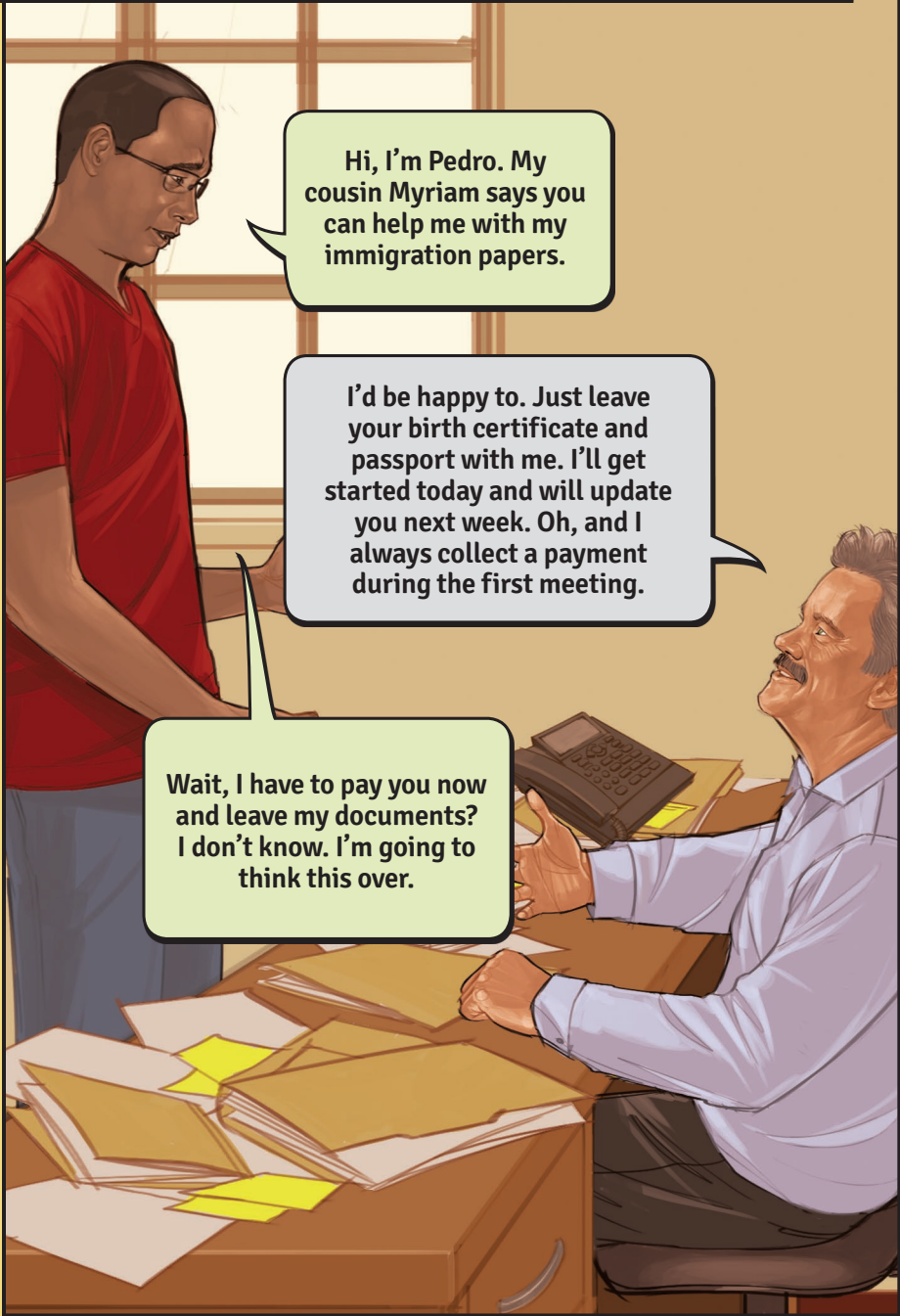
People who mean well, like a friend, a family member, or a teacher, can cause problems for you later.



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 believes that a notario must know more than his neighbor.

A comic book panel showing a man in a red shirt (Pedro) standing and talking to a man in a light blue shirt (Mr. Ruiz) sitting at a desk. The desk is cluttered with papers and folders. Mr. Ruiz has a calculator and a telephone on his desk. Pedro is holding a folder. There are three speech bubbles containing their conversation.

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

I'd be happy to. Just leave your birth certificate and passport with me. 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 in the United States are not licensed attorneys and can't help you with the immigration process or give legal advice.



A few weeks later, Myriam 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 immigration advice.

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

I attended a free legal clinic and they told me the Federal Trade Commission has advice to avoid and report notario scams at [ftc.gov/immigration](https://www.ftc.gov/immigration).

Only an immigration attorney or an accredited representative working for an organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice can give you legal immigration advice. Find out more at [ftc.gov/immigration](https://ftc.gov/immigration).

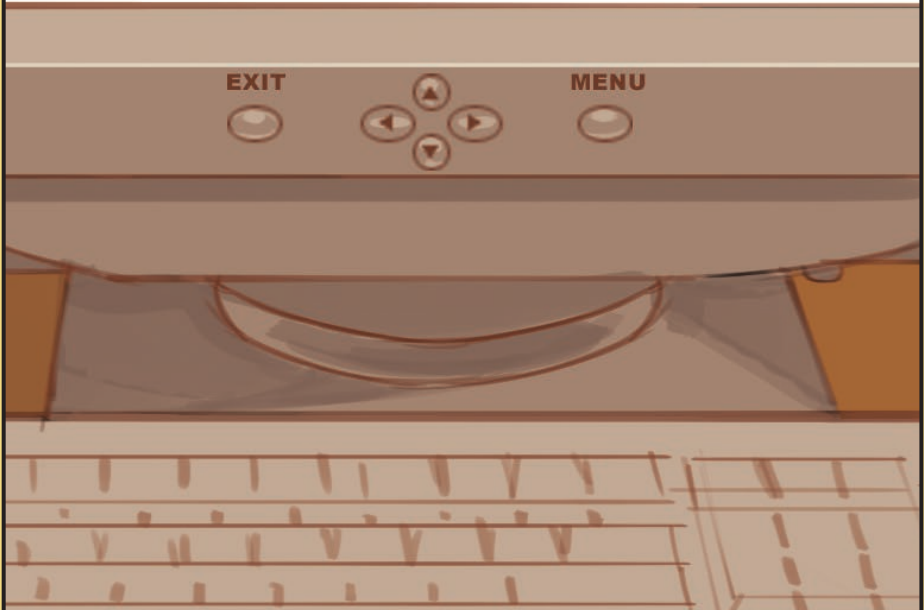
A **lawyer** must be a member of the professional association in the state where they practice in and may charge you a fee. To find an immigration lawyer, you can:

- contact USCIS at 1-800-375-5283 or [uscis.gov/EviteEstafas](https://uscis.gov/EviteEstafas)
- search the American Immigration Lawyers Association website at [ailalawyer.com](https://ailalawyer.com)


An **accredited representative**:

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

Learn more about who can help you at [ftc.gov/immigration](https://ftc.gov/immigration).







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

I'm lucky he didn't ruin my  
chances of immigrating. Now,  
I'm going to report him to the  
Federal Trade Commission.



## HOW TO AVOID AN IMMIGRATION SCAM

- **Don't go to a notario or notario público for immigration help.** Notarios aren't lawyers and can't give you legal advice. Don't pay a notario upfront.

### Forms and Documents

- **Never sign a blank form or a form with false information.** And don't let anyone keep your original documents.
- **Don't pay for immigration forms.** They are free at [uscis.gov](https://uscis.gov). Or you can call 1-800-375-5283, or go to a U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services office.
- **Only a lawyer or an accredited representative authorized by the U.S. Department of Justice can give you legal advice.** Find real immigration help at [ftc.gov/immigration](https://ftc.gov/immigration).

Report fraud, scams, and any bad business practice to the FTC at [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](https://www.ftc.gov/report-fraud) or by calling 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357). You can report your experience and give as much or as little information as you want. Your report helps the FTC investigate, stop fraud, and alert the community.

Order free copies of this fotonovela and other FTC educational materials in Spanish at [ftc.gov/fotonovelas](https://www.ftc.gov/fotonovelas).

Sign up to get scam alerts in English at [ftc.gov/ConsumerAlerts](https://www.ftc.gov/ConsumerAlerts) and in Spanish at [ftc.gov/AlertasDeConsumidor](https://www.ftc.gov/AlertasDeConsumidor).



**August 2023**