HOW MIRIAM AND PEDRO LEARNED ABOUT NOTARIO SCAMS

A FOTONOVELA FROM THE FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION
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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.
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.
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.
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. Some sites that look official but don’t end in .gov might charge you for forms.
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?
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.
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.
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.
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.

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