

December 11, 2014

Dear District Attorney Brown,

We, the undersigned, write to urge the creation of a bureau or division within the Queens County District Attorney's office dedicated to protecting Queens' immigrant communities by, amongst other things, investigating and prosecuting those unscrupulous individuals who defraud immigrants not only of money, but also potential eligibility for immigration relief.

The beneficial impact of immigrants on New York City is undeniable. Since its near bankruptcy in the 1970s, immigrants have played a key role in restructuring and revitalizing the City in four key ways: (1) immigrants have reversed New York City's population decline; (2) immigrant communities have been attributed with reducing crime rates in their neighborhoods, thereby lowering the city's overall crime rate; (3) immigrants have revitalized formerly struggling neighborhoods, re-creating them as alternatives for the middle class; and (4) immigrant arrivals have directly correlated to a boost in home equity citywide¹.

Not only is Queens County home to over one third of New York City's immigrant residents², it also has one of the fastest growing immigrant populations of New York State³. This reflects Queens' rich immigrant history and its present significance as an enclave for myriad immigrant community strongholds. In 2011 over half of Queens residents were foreign born⁴. Moreover, Queens' immigrant communities are more diverse than in any other New York City borough or than any other locality in the United States⁵. Of the five boroughs, Queens is the only New York City county to have a plurality of Asian immigrant communities⁶.

Despite their powerful contributions and significant numbers, untold numbers of immigrants are prevented from meeting their full potential because they have fallen victim to fraudulent practitioners, either non-lawyers posing as individuals able to provide legal assistance or bad attorneys seeking to take advantage of immigrants' vulnerable situations. Employment agencies, licensed to place job-seekers into paying positions, have particularly flourished in Queens during the years of the economic recession, and have become a hotbed for these types of unscrupulous individuals⁷. Such scams are not limited to employment agencies however. They are also prevalent in travel agencies, translation service businesses, and law firms amongst many others.

Given the high numbers of both immigrant communities and fraudulent practitioners in Queens, we urge you to create a unit tasked specifically with protecting Queens' immigrants. Although lower crime rates in immigrant communities decrease the overall numbers, immigrants' distrust in their government's willingness to protect them also leads to lower reporting of crime, making all New Yorkers less safe. Moreover, the harm inflicted by immigrant scams, including loss of substantial amounts of money, loss of eligibility for future immigration benefits, and deportation, mean that Queens is unable to fully benefit from its large and vibrant immigrant population. Finally, as the chief agency tasked with ensuring that criminals

¹ "Immigration and New York City: The Contributions of Foreign Born Americans to New York's Renaissance, 1975-2013" Americas Society/Council of the Americas, April 2014. Available at <http://www.as-coa.org/sites/default/files/NYImmigrationReport2014.pdf>.

² "The Newest New Yorkers: Characteristics of the City's Foreign-Born Population" Department of City Planning, City of New York, 2013 ed. Available at http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/census/nny2013/nny_2013.pdf.

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ "Dreams and Schemes in Queens, New York: Immigrant Struggles to Find Work and Get Status in the Face of Consumer Fraud" by New Immigrant Community Empowerment and the Community Development Project at the Urban Justice Center, October 2012. Available at <http://www.cdp-ny.org/report/DreamsandSchemes.pdf>.

in Queens are prosecuted and punished for their actions, it is incumbent upon your office to actively and aggressively target those who seek to endanger such a high percentage of Queens residents.

As immigration remains ever-present in the news cycle, and as we prepare to hear what relief the President will extend to a large number of immigrants, the number of scams continue to skyrocket. We look forward to working with you and your staff to urgently address this issue within your community.

Very truly yours,

Assemblyman Francisco Moya
Councilmember Daniel Dromm
Councilmember Julissa Ferreras
Councilmember Carlos Menchaca

Adhikaar for Human Rights and Social Justice
African Life Center
ASAAL/NAVA
Bronx Works
Cabrini Immigrant Services of NYC
Catholic Migration Services
Central American Refugee Center
DRUM – South Asian Organizing Center
Diaspora Community Services
HANAC
Her Justice
Immigration Advocacy Services
The Immigrant Justice Corps
Immigrant & NonCitizen Rights Clinic, CUNY School of Law
Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement
Lutheran Social Services
Make the Road New York
Minkwon Center for Community Action
MRAPA
MTA
New Immigrant Community Empowerment
The New York Immigration Coalition
The Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights
New York Legal Assistance Group
OCA-NY Asian Pacific American Advocates
ONA New Americans Hotline
Pace Community Law Practice
Richmond Hill EDC
Safe Harbor Project, Brooklyn Law School
Sanctuary for Families
Queens Community House
Queens Legal Services
YWCA-NYC