

IMMIGRATION LEGAL SERVICE SCAMS

*RESPONSE &
MITIGATION
EFFORTS*



The Issue

Catholic Charities USA's (CCUSA) member agencies began reporting an immigration legal services scam affecting immigrant victims and agencies themselves in March 2025. The scam often began on social media, where scammers contacted and interacted with immigrants under the guise of a Catholic Charities agency. The scam used CCUSA and member agency logos, fraudulent letterhead and signatures, and other related identifiers to provide credibility and approach victims about a non-existent "immigrant assistance program" from a trusted and respected organization. Fraudulent letters, documentation, and even virtual meetings were also used in the scam. Artificial intelligence (AI) produced lawyer profile images, interviews, and other persuasive—but false—information. More than 60 agencies informed CCUSA of encountering this scam, with hundreds of individual cases and victims. In some instances, real lawyer information was used, creating an additional layer of victims affected by this scam. Lawyers have been contacted by people who believe they are clients, but the attorneys have never interacted with them.

Victims provided contact information to the scammers through social media interactions and connected further with the perpetrators via the WhatsApp messaging application. The scam initiated with a small fee so "Catholic Charities" could assist victims in their immigration case. If the victim accepted, there would be a problem or issue in the case that needed immediate attention and thousands of dollars. Losses ranged from a few hundred dollars to thousands of dollars. The worst financial losses amounted to nearly \$30,000 by three different families each.

At the time of this report, CCUSA is aware of the following:

1. Number of reported scams sent by CCUSA (individuals): 115¹
2. Number of ads reported and removed: 250+
3. Number of reporting agencies: 60+

The scammers have demanded at *least* **\$350,000** from **161 victims**, and there is confirmation that victims have paid over **\$200,000** to the scammers, with the actual number likely higher. The scammers have misrepresented themselves as CCUSA and numerous affiliated agencies.

CCUSA encouraged agencies to submit sample scams received by local victims. Hundreds of victims provided examples from over 30 states and 60 dioceses. CCUSA worked with law enforcement, government agencies, other nonprofits, including the American Bar Association (ABA) and the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), and even private law firms, to report and mitigate the harm caused by the scams. One report² indicates the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is investigating a sophisticated network of scammers who target people caught in immigration proceedings. **CCUSA will continue to work with organizations that possess the bona fide intent of helping victims and member agencies affected by this scam.**

1 Agencies have submitted hundreds of scam examples to CCUSA. The reported numbers only list cases in which CCUSA's logo or other identifiers were used and additional steps could be taken to report and remove ads.

2 Roy, Naisha, Medill Investigation Lab, J. David McSwane, ProPublica, "DHS Plans 'All-Out War' on Immigration Scammers as Fraud Complaints Double," *Pro Publica*, July 16, 2026, available at: <https://www.propublica.org/article/trump-dhs-immigration-scams-fraud-homeland-security>.

Catholic Charities Network Resources

CCUSA's membership is made up of 170 diocesan Catholic Charities agencies. Each falls under the auspices of its local bishop/archbishop and serves the needs of the community in which it is located. In service of those agencies, CCUSA alerted the network about this scam and provided guidance. The scams included CCUSA's logo on paperwork, requiring confirmation that a legal service program did not exist and the organization neither provides direct legal services nor requests client fees. Potential victims contacted by a "Catholic Charities organization" were encouraged to contact and verify details with the local agency, especially before sending any money. Local agencies were encouraged to contact Spanish and English media to notify immigrant communities about this scam and reduce the possibility of more victims. The agencies and victims were also encouraged to work with law enforcement where appropriate. Alerts were posted on the CCUSA website.

The screenshot displays the Catholic Charities USA website. The top navigation bar includes links for 'WHAT WE DO', 'WAYS TO GIVE', 'ADVOCACY', 'STORIES', 'ABOUT US', 'Member Login', 'News', and 'Publications'. There are also language options for 'EN' and 'ES', and buttons for 'GET HELP' and 'DONATE'. The main content area features a dark teal background with white text. The headline reads: 'Alert: Scammers Use Catholic Charities Name to Target Those Seeking Immigration Legal Services'. Below the headline, a paragraph states: 'Scammers, claiming to be Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) or individual Catholic Charities agencies, are duping victims into paying fees to "enroll" in non-existent programs. CCUSA encourages anyone who encounters this scam or suspects they have been solicited by a scammer to contact their local Catholic Charities agency. In addition, the Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC) offers resources on identifying and preventing immigration services fraud.' The bottom section of the screenshot shows the Spanish version of the website. The navigation bar includes links for 'QUÉ HACEMOS', 'FORMAS DE DONAR', 'APOYO', 'HISTORIAS', 'QUIÉNES SOMOS', 'Inicio de sesión', 'Noticias', and 'Publicaciones'. The main content area features a large image of a building with the text: 'Trabajar para reducir la pobreza en Estados Unidos'. Below this, a paragraph states: 'Caridades Católicas de Estados Unidos apoya una red nacional de organismos comprometidos con acompañar a las personas marginadas, independientemente de su fe. Únase a nosotros para brindar ayuda y crear esperanza para los necesitados.' At the bottom, a small alert reads: 'Alerta: Estafadores usan el nombre de Caridades Católicas para atraer a quienes buscan servicios legales de inmigración'.

WHAT WE DO ▾ WAYS TO GIVE ▾ ADVOCACY ▾ STORIES ABOUT US ▾ Member Login News Publications EN ES GET HELP DONATE

Catholic Charities agencies provide care to our sisters and brothers, who often come to us in their time of greatest need. Our ministry to vulnerable people on the move is a cornerstone of our Catholic identity.

Alert: Scammers Use Catholic Charities Name to Target Those Seeking Immigration Legal Services

Scammers, claiming to be Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) or individual Catholic Charities agencies, are duping victims into paying fees to "enroll" in non-existent programs. CCUSA encourages anyone who encounters this scam or suspects they have been solicited by a scammer to contact their local Catholic Charities agency. In addition, the Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC) offers resources on identifying and preventing immigration services fraud.

QUÉ HACEMOS ▾ FORMAS DE DONAR ▾ APOYO ▾ HISTORIAS QUIÉNES SOMOS ▾ Inicio de sesión Noticias Publicaciones EN ES

Catholic Charities USA

Trabajar para reducir la pobreza en Estados Unidos

Caridades Católicas de Estados Unidos apoya una red nacional de organismos comprometidos con acompañar a las personas marginadas, independientemente de su fe. Únase a nosotros para brindar ayuda y crear esperanza para los necesitados.

► Alerta: Estafadores usan el nombre de Caridades Católicas para atraer a quienes buscan servicios legales de inmigración



The Council of
Diocesan Directors

Directors,

CCUSA is aware of multiple immigration legal service scams that use Catholic Charities' name to victimize vulnerable immigrants. Both CCUSA and individual agency names are being used across the country. Scammers are claiming immigrants are being enrolled in non-existent programs and are required to send fees. CCUSA is running no direct service programs.

We encourage you to notify your programs and staff:

1. CCUSA is not running a legal service program and does not provide direct services. CCUSA would never request fees from clients.
2. Any client, potential client, or community member receiving solicitation from any "Catholic Charities organization" should be encouraged to contact their local Catholic Charities agency to discuss the notice.
3. Do not send any money and work with the local Catholic Charities agency to avoid falling victim to these scams.
4. Agencies are encouraged to notify CCUSA.
5. Contact your local bar association(s) to see whether unauthorized practice of immigration law (UPIL) or notario fraud resources are available. [The Catholic Legal Immigration Network](#) (CLINIC) has a resource page on notario fraud.

To reduce the number of potential victims, CCUSA also suggests working with consenting potential victims and contact:

1. Local media (Spanish and English) to notify immigrant communities about this scam and reduce the possibility of more victims.
2. Where appropriate, law enforcement.

CCUSA's communications staff created network scam resources to permit member agencies to develop their own materials and enter their contact information.

¡NO CAIGA EN ESTA ESTAFA DE INMIGRACIÓN!

Estafadores que dicen ser de Catholic Charities están engañando a personas que buscan servicios legales de inmigración.

ASÍ FUNCIONA LA ESTAFA

El estafador se comunica por WhatsApp, mensaje de texto, correo electrónico o por redes sociales ofreciendo ayuda con inmigración.

Dice trabajar para Catholic Charities.

Pide información personal, como su número de Seguro Social o dirección.

Solicita pagos a través de Zelle u otras plataformas digitales.

¡No Responda ni Comparta Información!

En cambio:

- Comuníquese de inmediato con Catholic Charities para reportar el fraude.
- Guarde los mensajes, pero no responda a los estafadores.
- Si compartió información financiera, contacte a su banco o compañía de tarjeta de crédito de inmediato para alertar del fraude.

Comuníquese con [Nombre de la agencia de Catholic Charities] al [NÚMERO DE TELÉFONO LOCAL], en línea en [DIRECCIÓN WEB] o en persona en [DIRECCIÓN].

Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc (CLINIC) también ofrece recursos para identificar y prevenir fraudes de servicios migratorios. Llame a su oficina nacional al 301.565.4800 para asistencia local.

¡NO CAIGA EN ESTA ESTAFA DE INMIGRACIÓN!

Estafadores que dicen ser de Catholic Charities están engañando a personas que buscan servicios legales de inmigración.

ASÍ FUNCIONA LA ESTAFA

El estafador se comunica por WhatsApp, mensaje de texto, correo electrónico o por redes sociales ofreciendo ayuda con inmigración.

Dice trabajar para Catholic Charities.

Pide información personal, como su número de Seguro Social o dirección.

Solicita pagos a través de Zelle u otras plataformas digitales.

¡No Responda ni Comparta Información!

En cambio:

- Comuníquese de inmediato con Catholic Charities para reportar el fraude.
- Guarde los mensajes, pero no responda a los estafadores.
- Si compartió información financiera, contacte a su banco o compañía de tarjeta de crédito de inmediato para alertar del fraude.

Comuníquese con [Nombre de la agencia de Catholic Charities] al [NÚMERO DE TELÉFONO LOCAL], en línea en [DIRECCIÓN WEB] o en persona en [DIRECCIÓN].

Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc (CLINIC) también ofrece recursos para identificar y prevenir fraudes de servicios migratorios. Llame a su oficina nacional al 301.565.4800 para asistencia local.

DON'T FALL FOR THIS IMMIGRATION SCAM!

Scammers claiming to be from Catholic Charities are targeting clients seeking immigration legal services.

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS

The scammer reaches out on WhatsApp, text, email, or social media, offering immigration assistance.

They say they're from Catholic Charities.

They ask for personal information such as your Social Security number or address.

They request payment over Zelle or other digital payment platforms.

Do Not Respond or Provide Information!

Instead:

- Immediately contact Catholic Charities to report the fraud.
- Save the messages but do not engage.
- If you have provided financial information, report the scam to your bank/credit card company.

Contact [Catholic Charities agency] at [LOCAL PHONE NUMBER], online at [web address] or in person at [street address].

The Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC) also offers resources to identify and prevent immigration services fraud. Call their national office at 301.565.4800 for local assistance.

DON'T FALL FOR THIS IMMIGRATION SCAM!

Scammers claiming to be from Catholic Charities are targeting clients seeking immigration legal services.

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS

The scammer reaches out on WhatsApp, text, email, or social media, offering immigration assistance.

They say they're from Catholic Charities.

They ask for personal information such as your Social Security number or address.

They request payment over Zelle or other digital payment platforms.

Do Not Respond or Provide Information!

Instead:

- Immediately contact Catholic Charities to report the fraud.
- Save the messages but do not engage.
- If you have provided financial information, report the scam to your bank/credit card company.

Contact [Catholic Charities agency] at [LOCAL PHONE NUMBER], online at [web address] or in person at [street address].

The Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC) also offers resources to identify and prevent immigration services fraud. Call their national office at 301.565.4800 for local assistance.

Catholic Charities Monterey's Post



Catholic Charities Monterey shared a profile.

February 27 · 🌐

🚨 SCAM ALERT / ALERTA DE ESTAFA 🚨

If someone contacts you claiming to offer immigration legal services through Catholic Charities — it is fraudulent.

Si alguien lo contacta ofreciendo servicios legales de inmigración diciendo que está conectado con Caridades Católicas — es una estafa.

Do NOT send money or share personal information.

NO envíe dinero ni comparta información personal.

Verify directly with us / Verifique directamente con nosotros:

☎ 831.422.0760

☎ 805.541.9120

Please share / Por favor comparta.



Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington's Post

If you receive a suspicious message from someone claiming to be from our organization, do not respond. Visit our website to learn more and contact us directly.

For more information, visit <https://bit.ly/4gt82Nh>



BEWARE OF SCAM

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington (CCADW) has been made aware of individuals falsely claiming to be our attorneys or staff and contacting immigrants through WhatsApp and other messaging platforms including Facebook



 CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF ORANGE COUNTY

 catholiccharitiesoc [Follow](#)

We want to alert our community about scammers who are targeting individuals seeking immigration legal services. Please note the following:
Catholic Charities of Orange County will NEVER request payment through:

- Direct messages
- Zelle
- WhatsApp
- Venmo
- Any other online or mobile payment apps

We do not send invoices to clients requesting payment for services.
We only accept payments in person, and only by check or money order.
We will never ask for payment over the phone or the internet.
If you need assistance with your immigration case, please contact our office directly at 714-347-9610 to schedule a consultation with one of our DOJ Accredited Representatives.

Catholic Charities Media and Communications

CCUSA conducted interviews with media to discuss efforts to combat the scams. CCUSA requested that media provide the information in both Spanish and English to notify immigrant communities about this scam and reduce the possibility of more victims.



<https://www.telemundoareadelabahia.com/noticias/local/richmond-estafa-migratoria-caridades-catolicas/2532632/>



"Alleged scammers use fake lawyers and fake courts to prey on immigrants," ABC News
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSsCT3L4Brk>

“There’s a reason why we have a good reputation,” said Chris Ross, vice president of migration and refugee resettlement services at Catholic Charities. “And so for someone to be trading on that goodwill with nefarious intent is very frustrating.”

Fear and Opportunity: Immigration Scams Surged as Trump’s Sweeps Lured Desperate People to Eager Defrauders

<https://www.propublica.org/article/trump-immigration-scams-complaints-doubled-ice>

Catholic Charities has [publicly warned](#) that its representatives are being impersonated to scam immigrants.

“Scammers are using the name, images, and likeness of Catholic Charities USA – or just the name Catholic Charities in general – to scam immigrants by promising them services and then not following through” Cecilia Baxter, an attorney with Catholic Charities, [said in a recent interview](#) with the Catholic Worldwide Network.

Deportation Fears Make Immigrants Easy Targets for Scams

Six immigrants in five states describe losing between \$1,300 and \$11,000 to people who impersonated law firms or staged fake hearings via video calls.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/scammers-target-immigrants-fear-deportation-rcna331705>

CALIFORNIA

They hoped to fix their immigration status. They got scammed instead

“These are people who are trying to follow the rules and navigate a very complex legal system. Their best intentions are being taken advantage of,” said Kevin Brennan, the vice president of communications at Catholic Charities USA, an organization that represents more than 170 religious agencies across the country.

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2026-07-31/they-hoped-to-fix-their-immigration-status-they-got-scammed-instead>

LOCAL STATISTICS

CCUSA's report is intended to portray this issue from a national perspective. Member agencies are encouraged to compile their diocesan-specific amounts of victims, financial loss, and local mitigation efforts and insert the local statistics with this report. A template for agencies to compile this information is included on the next page. Agencies that collect the information are encouraged to share their completed document and this report with diocesan and community leaders. CCUSA also requests a copy of each local report.

CLOSING

CCUSA and its member agencies continue to take this scam very seriously because it affects the communities we serve and has a deleterious effect on Catholic Charities' name, reputation, and mission. If you encounter this scam or suspect that you have been solicited by a scammer, do not respond, provide information, or send money! [Contact your local Catholic Charities agency](#)³ to inquire about legitimate immigration legal services they may offer. The Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC) offers additional resources on [identifying and preventing immigration services fraud](#)⁴.

3 <https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/about-us/find-a-local-agency/>

4 <https://www.cliniclegal.org/resources/protecting-your-community/unauthorized-practice-immigration-law>



Agency Response Template

Member agency name: _____

Diocese: _____

Number of victims in the diocese (as of date): _____

Estimated total financial losses by victims: _____

Estimated average financial loss by individual victims: _____

Synopsis of scams in the diocese:

Diocesan alert(s), agency website alert(s), social media posts, etc. (synopsis):

Communications efforts (synopsis):

Interactions with law enforcement, nonprofits, and other entities seeking to assist victims (synopsis):

Additional notes or comments:

CatholicCharitiesUSA.org

*2050 Ballenger Ave., Suite 400
Alexandria, VA, 22314*

703-549-1390

