



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
February 11, 2016

For More Information, Contact:
Scott Moore (503) 986-1904
scott.moore@state.or.us

House Votes to Crack Down on Fraudulent “Notarios”

House Bill 4128 protects vulnerable populations from phony “immigration consultants”

The Oregon House today voted unanimously to clamp down on phony “notario businesses,” which purport to be legitimate immigration or legal consultants but in reality prey on vulnerable populations.

[House Bill 4128](#) came out of the Notario Fraud Task Force, which put together a comprehensive package of policies to increase enforcement tools against these abusive practices. The task force was co-chaired by Rep. Jessica Vega Pederson (D-Portland) and Sen. Sara Gelser (D-Corvallis).

Under current law, only lawyers and federally authorized representatives can provide advice on immigration matters. But problems have arisen where someone receives a notary license from the Secretary of State’s office, and then advertises services as a “notario” or “notario publico.” In many Latin American and European countries, “notario” refers to someone who effectively has the same training and authority as an attorney.

Across Oregon, there are notarios advertising that they can handle immigration and legal matters, but then extract thousands of dollars from individuals for services they don’t have the authority or training to handle.

"There are reports that some notarios victimize those they’ve taken advantage of by threatening them with harm if they seek help," says Rep. Joe Gallegos (D-Hillsboro). "There have also been reports of notarios demanding additional money, holding important legal documents as ransom, or threatening to report clients or family members to the authorities."

HB 4128 addresses these fraudulent practices in several ways. It expands the crime of obstructing governmental or judicial administration to include acting as a notary public or an immigration consultant without authorization and with the intent to defraud. It also expands the crime of theft by extortion to include compelling or inducing a person to refrain from reporting unlawful conduct to a law enforcement agent.

"This bill is a response to a very serious problem of abuse perpetrated on our immigrant communities," says Rep. Vega Pederson. "House Bill 4128 gives law enforcement the tools they need to crack down on these fraudulent practices."

###