



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

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NEWS ALERT – IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Fake immigration lawyer gets 10 years in prison for stealing people's dreams and money

LOS ANGELES – Dozens of nervous people crowded a courtroom in the Criminal Courthouse in downtown Los Angeles on February 3, 2009, anxious to tell their stories of how a fake lawyer robbed them of their dreams and savings. As person after person stood up and shared his or her story with the presiding judge, a common thread developed – **Romina Zadorian**, 39, of Montebello preyed on their desperate need to legalize their status in the United States, shattering their lives and dreams through a web of lies, deception, and false promises.

Brenda Garcia (not the real names to protect victims) described how Zadorian promised her that she would "fix her papers" to stay in the United States so her leukemia-stricken son could get medical help. Instead, Ms. Garcia said Zadorian got her a deportation order. Ms. Garcia said her US-born son will not get the medical treatment he needs to stay alive in her native country. He is 8-years-old. **Miriam Abassian** said that her gravely ill husband wanted to see their two sons, whom they left in their native Armenia when they came to the United States several years ago. She sought Zadorian's help, who promised she would legalize and bring her sons to the United States in a few weeks. She paid Zadorian \$18,000 for her services. Her sons never arrived. Her husband died asking to see them. **Maribel Soto** said she paid Zadorian a few thousand dollars to renew her residency. Ms. Soto said she was fired from her job as a pre-school teacher because Zadorian never did anything. Through her own research, Ms. Soto found out she only needed to complete a simple form online to renew her residency. Handcuffed and dressed in a jail jumpsuit, Zadorian smiled as people told their stories.

Presiding Judge **Kathleen Kennedy** apologized to people for the harm Zadorian caused them. She told them she was sorry she could not undue the damage Zadorian did to them. She assured them, however, that she was going to provide them with the best justice possible.

Judge Kennedy then sentenced Zadorian to 10 years in prison, and ordered her to pay each victim a full refund, totaling \$900,000. Before she asked the Court bailiff to remand Zadorian to start serving her sentence, Judge Kennedy told Zadorian that she was a "sociopath" incapable of feeling any remorse or empathy for the harm she caused her victims. The victims thanked Judge Kennedy for bringing them justice.

Zadorian, herself not a US citizen, faces deportation to her native Armenia upon completion of her sentence.

Romina Zadorian
February 4, 2009

The sentencing concluded one of the largest immigration fraud cases in Los Angeles. **Pastor Herrera, Jr.**, Director of the County of Los Angeles Department of Consumer Affairs, said that his agency launched an investigation in response to dozens of victim complaints. "People reported that Zadorian charged fees ranging from \$6,000 to \$30,000 for services she never provided," Herrera said. According to the complaints, Zadorian assured consumers that she could help them with their cases because she knew special laws and had special connections with immigration officials. Instead, Zadorian filed wrong documents, submitted bad checks for payment of fees, or did nothing at all.

In April 2008, the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office arrested and charged Zadorian with 51 counts of felony grand theft. Prosecutors added 55 more counts two months later after identifying more victims. The victims are from many different countries, including Israel, Mexico, Armenia, China, and Belgium.

Consumer Affairs offers consumers these tips to spot and avoid immigration scams:

- **Confirm bond** – Non-lawyers who provide immigration services must have a \$50,000 bond. You can file a claim against the bond if you are defrauded. Confirm bonds here: www.sos.ca.gov/business/sf/bond_search/
- **Non-lawyers cannot give you legal advice** – Consult an immigration attorney if you need help. Non-lawyers can hurt your case and cost you a lot of money. Verify attorney licenses here: members.calbar.ca.gov/search/member.aspx
- **Get a contract in your language** – You have the right to get a contract in your language and in English that lists the services you are getting, tells you how much you will pay, and gives you 3 days to cancel without any charge.
- **Cancel your contract in writing** – If you cancel your contract, do it in writing. Send your letter by certified mail and keep a copy.
- **Get receipts** – Request receipts for each payment you make. Save them.
- **Don't give out your original documents** – Give them copies only, and keep your originals in a safe place.
- **Beware of promises** – People who tell you they know special laws, have connections with immigration officials, or can rush your case are lying.
- **Look for signs inside the office** – Non-lawyers who help with immigration cases must display signs that say they are not lawyers, show their name and bond number, and list the fees they charge for each service.
- **Check your case status with US Citizenship and Immigration Services often:** If you have a receipt number from USCIS, you can check online here: egov.uscis.gov/cris/caseStatusSearchDisplay.do;jsessionid=cbapzIZIAGakX-ldRsd9r. If you don't have a receipt number, you can check in person. Find your closest office here: egov.uscis.gov/crisgwi/go?action=offices.type&OfficeLocator.office_type=LO
- **Report fraud right away** – If you believe something is wrong, file a complaint with the County of Los Angeles Department of Consumer Affairs: 800-593-8222, www.dca.lacounty.gov