

Unauthorized Practice of Law

What is unauthorized practice of law?

It refers to anyone who practices law but is not a licensed attorney.

What is “practicing law”?

It includes giving legal advice, preparing legal documents, appearing in court, and *any other service* typically done by lawyers.

Who is allowed to provide legal services?

By law, there are only three ways that people are allowed to give any kind of legal help for money:

- (1) if they're a licensed attorney;
- (2) if they're a paralegal being supervised by a licensed attorney who's named on their business card; or
- (3) if they're a “Legal Document Assistant” and registered with the County. (Even then, they're only allowed to type up standard documents that *you request*; they can't give any legal advice!)

Anyone who falls outside these three definitions is committing a crime and you should not give them your money! If they're doing business in Santa Monica, please report them to the Consumer Protection Unit.

How can I tell if someone is really a lawyer?

Check their name on the State Bar website (www.calbar.ca.gov).

What about immigration consultants?

This is a common area of fraud. Immigration consultants must be bonded by the state and cannot make any promises that are not in writing and with a factual basis. Otherwise, they're guilty of a separate crime.

A non-lawyer offered to help me with my eviction. Is that okay?

Not if they're giving legal advice or helping with any of the legal aspects of the case. Also, "Unlawful Detainer Assistants" must be specially registered with the State of California or they've committed a separate crime.

If you have a complaint or question about a Santa Monica business or would like more information about consumer rights, call the City Attorney's Consumer Protection Unit at (310) 458-8336.