

[Immigrants' guide to finding free or low-cost legal services](#)

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BY Matthew Burnett

A lot of people have immigration options, but it's hard to understand what they are and find out if you qualify.

In fact, research suggests that over 1.5 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. may be eligible for an existing immigration benefit — they just don't realize it. It doesn't help that the immigration law is so complex and that finding good legal help can be difficult.

But the more that people understand their immigration options, the better we can protect ourselves and our communities.

Knowledge is power. If you are undocumented, get expert advice — maybe you qualify for an immigration status but don't know it. A great starting point that won't cost you anything is www.immi.org, where you can take an online interview to understand your immigration options, learn about your rights, and connect to trusted nonprofit legal programs that can help you for free or at a low cost.

The site works on any device, is available in English and Spanish, and you can get started without having to talk to anyone.

If you want a face-to-face consultation with an immigration lawyer, but can't afford the legal fees, you can find a free or low-cost nonprofit legal service provider at www.immigrationlawhelp.org.

Don't have access to the internet? In New York City, you can call 311. In New York State, call the NYS Office of New Americans Hotline at 800-566-7636.

If you want to hire a private attorney, use the American Immigration Lawyers Association's Immigration Lawyer Search at www.aialawyer.com.

If you already have a green card and want to become a U.S. citizen, try Citizenshipworks, a free online naturalization application assistance program at www.citizenshipworks.org.

It will help you complete your application on your own and connect you with a nonprofit legal provider if you have a more complex case.

Here's some more good advice: Protect yourself against immigration scams. There are people who use internet, mail, phone and businesses to lie about opportunities. They trick immigrants into giving them money to fix an immigration problem or make an application.

To avoid being scammed get information you can trust, be careful how you share your documents or personal information, and be a smart consumer of legal services.

Remember that only lawyers and BIA accredited representatives (or BIA reps, who can only work for non-profits) are qualified to give immigration legal advice.

Notaries and "immigration consultants" are not allowed to give legal advice, and the wrong legal help can hurt an immigration case and cost a lot of money for bad service or no service at all.

Review and understand all forms before you sign, and always get a copy of any forms or papers.

Whatever you do, don't wait. It's more important now than ever that you understand your legal options, know your rights, and take steps to protect your future.

These include collecting your documents in a safe place, making a family plan if you are vulnerable to deportation, or applying for U.S. citizenship if you are eligible.

If you have friends, family or colleagues who are at risk, encourage them to act. Taking action now will help to prevent potential immigration problems in the future.

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