



# News Release

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## **New Jersey Judiciary Warns Litigants against Notarios Públicos Who Are Not Authorized to Practice Law**

The Judiciary has announced a public campaign to educate litigants about non-lawyers who offer legal services to unsuspecting litigants. In particular, Spanish-speaking court users should be aware that “notarios públicos” or notaries public, are not authorized to give legal advice or represent litigants in court.

“It is very important to educate the Spanish-speaking community about this issue,” said Judge Glenn A. Grant, acting administrative director of the courts. “Notarios are not attorneys, they are not trained to provide legal services, and they are not authorized to prepare court documents or to represent litigants in court.”

In addition to displaying posters in Superior Court locations (see attached), the Judiciary has mailed letters to hundreds of libraries, service organizations and non-profits asking them to help educate the public about this issue.

“In some countries,” the letter reads in part, “a ‘notario público’ is considered a person of standing in the courts, and some litigants wrongly believe that a notario público is an attorney. As you know, notaries in this country are not attorneys and are not permitted to practice law by preparing documents, providing legal advice or appearing in court on behalf of others.... This activity not only constitutes the unauthorized practice of law, but it also puts litigants unknowingly at risk if they receive poor advice or are misled by those to whom they have come for assistance.”

In New Jersey, a notary is authorized to serve as a witness when someone has an important document to sign, and also can administer oaths and affirmations. By law, notaries can charge no more than \$2.50 for this service. There is no special training required to become a notary, and no special knowledge of state or local laws is required.

“Notaries perform important functions in our communities,” said Judge Grant. “But providing legal services is not one of those functions.”

While some litigants might turn to notarios públicos because they believe that they will charge less for their services; that is not always the case, particularly if the notario is unscrupulous enough to offer unauthorized legal representation.

Court users can click on the “Español” button at the top of the Judiciary website, njcourts.com, to see all of the Judiciary’s online resources that are available in Spanish, including the database of attorneys licensed to practice in New Jersey. Legal Services of New Jersey also offers assistance to Spanish-speaking litigants, including publications written in Spanish and a toll-free hotline for those who qualify for free legal assistance.

While all litigants are encouraged to consider hiring an attorney, there are also a number of resources available to help litigants who come to court without an attorney. The Judiciary website has many self-help resources available in Spanish, including a host of forms and instructions for a variety of case types. The Judiciary also has an ombudsman in each vicinage to help litigants navigate the court system. While they cannot offer legal advice, ombudsmen are available to answer questions about court processes and procedures and to help litigants find the necessary forms and other resources to proceed with their cases.

“I urge anyone seeking legal assistance to explore all available resources, including Legal Services of New Jersey, local lawyer referral services, our Spanish-language website, and the vicinage ombudsman, to see what help they might find.” said Judge Grant.

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