

Immigration: Frequently Asked Questions

For updated information, visit: courts.ca.gov/immigration.htm

These FAQs do not give legal advice. They provide only general information. They cannot help you with your case or situation. A lawyer can give you advice if you have specific questions. These FAQs can help you find a lawyer.

What can a California state court do?

Most courts in California are **California state courts**. California state courts handle most types of legal cases, such as divorce, traffic tickets, and criminal cases.

California state courts serve all people.

It does not matter what language you speak or where you were born.



California state courts do not decide if you can stay in the United States. But in a few instances (see below), what happens in a California state court may affect your immigration status.

What can't a California state court do?

California state courts do **not** decide if you can stay in the United States. Only the **U.S. federal government** can decide your immigration status. The federal government is separate and different from California state courts.

To find U.S. federal government resources, see below.

Can a California state court affect immigration status?

A California state court cannot decide your immigration status. But what happens in a California state court may affect your immigration status.

What happens in a California state court may help you if you are:

- Under the age of 21 and have been separated from or hurt by a parent
- The victim of a crime, domestic violence, sex trafficking, or labor trafficking

To learn more, ask a lawyer. See below for help finding a lawyer.

What happens in a California state court may negatively affect your immigration status if you are:

- Found to have committed certain crimes or violated a protective order.



Ask your lawyer about how your court case might affect your immigration status.

Who can help?

Immigration law is very complex. Hire a licensed lawyer or accredited representative to help you with your immigration case. If you do not have money for a lawyer, see the links below for free or low-cost help.

Check if your lawyer is licensed in California or has been disciplined:

800-843-9053

members.calbar.ca.gov/fal/MemberSearch/QuickSearch

Check if your representative is accredited:

justice.gov/eoir/recognition-accreditation-roster-reports

Where to find an immigration lawyer?

The organizations at the links below can help you find an immigration lawyer. You can also look for others online or ask organizations you trust in your area for help. The Judicial Council and California Courts do not provide referrals to specific lawyers, or recommend or endorse any of the organizations listed. We are not responsible for them. We give you these links so you can find the help you need.

Find a private immigration attorney

California State Bar

Lawyer Referral Service

866-442-CA-LAW, 866-442-2529

members.calbar.ca.gov/fal/MemberSearch/FindLegalHelp

American Immigration Lawyers Association

Immigration Lawyer Search

ailalawyer.com/

Bar Association of San Francisco

Lawyer Referral and Information Service

415-989-1616

TDD: 415-782-8985

Monday–Friday, 8:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. PST

sfbar.org/lawyerreferrals/immigration-lawyers.aspx

SmartLaw

Los Angeles County Bar Association
866-SMARTLAW

smartlaw.org

San Diego Lawyer Referral Service

San Diego County Bar Association
800-464-1529
619-231-8585

Monday–Thursday, 9:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m.; Friday, 8:30 a.m.–3:30 a.m.

sdcba.org

Find free and low cost legal help**Immigration Law Help**

immigrationlawhelp.org/

U.S. Department of Justice

Pro Bono Legal Service Provider Lists

justice.gov/eoir/list-pro-bono-legal-service-providers-map

Unaccompanied Children Resource Center

uacresources.org/gethelp/

Immi

immi.org/info/FindLegalHelp

Airport Lawyer

If you are detained at an airport

airportlawyer.org

airportlawyer.org/arabic/ (Arabic)

airportlawyer.org/farsi/ (Farsi)

Citizenshipworks

If you want help becoming a U.S. citizen

citizenshipworks.org/findlegalhelp

Find a free legal clinic**Ready California**

ready-california.org/events-calendar/#1

International Institute of the Bay Area

iibayarea.org/workshops/

How to avoid immigration scams and fraud?

Beware of immigration scams! Immigration consultants and “notarios” are *not* lawyers. It is illegal for immigration consultants to:

- Pretend to be a lawyer or give you immigration advice
- Represent you in court
- Tell you which forms to fill out
- Keep your original documents
- Charge money to refer you to a lawyer

A “bonded” immigration consultant can only:

- Give you forms and help you fill them out
- Translate questions and answers for forms
- Help you collect documents.

“Bonded” means the immigration consultant has posted a \$100,000 bond with the California Secretary of State.

Check if your consultant is bonded:

916-653-4984

sos.ca.gov/business/sf/bond_search/

Learn more about immigration consultants:

sos.ca.gov/business-programs/immigration-consultants/

How to report immigration scams and fraud?

File a complaint if you are the victim of a scam or fraud by a notario or immigration consultant:

California State Bar

800-843-9053 (file a complaint)

866-879-4532 (immigration hotline)

calbar.ca.gov/Public/ConsumerInformation/immigrationconsultants.aspx

calbar.ca.gov/Public/AttorneyComplaints/NonattorneyUPLComplaints.aspx

California Department of Justice

Office of Immigration Assistance

888-587-0557

oag.ca.gov/contact/consumer-complaint-against-business-or-company

If you live in San Francisco, Los Angeles, or San Jose, file a complaint:

San Francisco District Attorney's Office

Consumer Mediation Unit

415-551-9595

<http://sfdistrictattorney.org/immigration-fraud>

Los Angeles County Department of Consumer and Business Affairs

800-593-8222

Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office

Notario Fraud Unit

408-808-4599

408-808-4431 (anonymous calls)

tips@Sheriff.sccgov.org

sccgov.org/sites/sheriff/Pages/Notario-Fraud-Unit.aspx

You may be able to bring a civil or small claims case in a California court. For more information, contact:

Small Claims Advisors

courts.ca.gov/selfhelp-advisors.htm

Self-Help Centers

courts.ca.gov/selfhelp-selfhelpcenters.htm

How can families prepare for separation?

Learn about how others can help take care of your children if you are separated:

courts.ca.gov/1210.htm

Find someone to help you

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Bet Tzedek

3250 Wilshire Blvd., 13th Floor

Los Angeles, CA 90010

323-939-0506

bettzedek.org

Centro Legal de la Raza

3400 E. 12th Street

Oakland, CA 94601

510-437-1554

centrolegal.org

Find U.S. federal government resources

If a parent is separated from a child

Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)

Call the Parent Hotline if you are a parent trying to find a child in ORR care:
800-203-7001, or text NINOS to 66467
7 days a week, 24 hours a day

If asking the U.S. federal government for immigration status

U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS)

My USCIS: my.uscis.gov

Find a USCIS office (including Asylum Offices): uscis.gov/about-us/find-uscis-office

Learn about lawful permanent residence (a green card): uscis.gov/greencard

Learn about U.S. citizenship: uscis.gov/us-citizenship

Learn about asylum: uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-asylum/asylum

After receiving a Notice to Appear from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Executive Office of Immigration Review

Find a federal immigration court: justice.gov/eoir/eoir-immigration-court-listing

The Los Angeles Immigration Court has a self-help center onsite.

Find self-help materials: justice.gov/eoir/self-help-materials

These materials will help you learn if you have received a Notice to Appear.

Call the Immigration Case Status Hotline for information about your immigration case:
800-898-7180

If looking for a family member or friend

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

Find someone detained by ICE: locator.ice.gov/odls/homePage.do

Find California state and local government resources

California Department of Social Services

Immigration Services

cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/Immigration

California Department of Justice

Office of Immigration Assistance

oag.ca.gov/immigrant

City of Los Angeles

Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

lamayor.org/Immigrants

City and County of San Francisco

Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs

sfgov.org/oceia

City of San Diego

New San Diegan Resource Center

sandiego.gov/newsandiegans

City of San Jose

Office of Immigrant Affairs

sanjoseca.gov/index.aspx?nid=4615

Santa Clara County

Office of Immigrant Relations

sccgov.org/sites/oir/Pages/oir.aspx

University of California

Immigration Information

universityofcalifornia.edu/immigration