

Lawyer for senator's wife files complaint vs. notario

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Body

An Atlanta immigration lawyer has filed a complaint with the Georgia Bar Association against a man he says could have gotten his client deported because of shoddy paperwork.

The lawyer, Charles Kuck, is representing Sascha Thompson, the Colombian wife of state Sen. Curt Thompson. Earlier this week, a federal judge threw out a deportation order against Sascha Thompson after hearing evidence that she was the victim of paperwork errors by a notario.

In many Latin American countries, "notario publicos" are respected members of the legal system --- at a level between lawyers and judges. But in the United States, the term translates to notary public, although the two jobs are not equivalent.

Advocates for immigrants say some Spanish speakers in the United States assume that those who advertise themselves as notarios have the same legal authority here as they do abroad.

Kuck named Tomas Vilela of Norcross as the man who filed improper paperwork on behalf of Sascha Thompson, who said she was trying to get help extending her student visa.

Lorraine Bell, a legal secretary in the Bar's Unlicensed Practice of Law Department, confirmed that a complaint had been filed.

Vilela declined to discuss the case Friday afternoon.

Under a state immigration law known as State Bill 529, notarios and others who provide immigration services must post signs at their business and in advertising that makes it clear if they are not a licensed lawyer.

This section of the law, which went into effect in April, also restricts the type of paperwork that nonlawyers may do on behalf of immigrants.

Each violation is subject to a \$1,000 fine.

People who pose as lawyers can face criminal charges resulting in a prison sentence.

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