

Workers alerted to scams related to immigration plan;

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Byline: Thomas Ginsberg INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Body

Advocates **warned** undocumented **workers** this week to beware of anybody selling services or documents purportedly connected with President Bush's yet-unapproved **legalization** proposal.

"People have been showing up at churches, at stores, saying they can bring relief and charging substantial sums of money - and then never bring anything," said Celso M. De Souza, director of the Brazilian Organization for Social Services, based in Philadelphia.

Bush's proposal is still just a proposal, advocates emphasized at a news conference Tuesday called by a coalition of 12 regional Latino organizations.

Though several **immigration**-overhaul bills are pending in Congress, nothing has been approved and no bill has been introduced from Bush's widely publicized speech Jan. 7 suggesting temporary work permits for an estimated 8 million to 10 million undocumented **workers**.

Bush's election-year proposal has come under bitter attack. One side has labeled it de facto amnesty; the other termed it dead-end temporary servitude. The odds that it would be approved this year appear low, many observers say.

Still, activists nationwide say swindlers have already begun taking advantage of immigrants' desire for legal status by trying to sell them help getting benefits that do not - and may never - exist.

In Miami and Denver, activists and Mexican consulates reported that unidentified "**immigration** experts" had gone door to door in predominantly Mexican neighborhoods offering help getting a visa under Bush's proposal.

In North Jersey, immigrants have reported being offered "green cards" under Bush's **plan** for \$3,000, said Marshall Fitz, director of advocacy for the nonpartisan American **Immigration** Lawyers Association.

In Philadelphia, activists called the news conference after learning that two undocumented Mexican **workers** in the city had paid \$2,000 each to a person offering legal documents purportedly under Bush's **plan**. They offered no other details.

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"You should not be fooled," said Rocio Vazquez, the Mexican consul in Philadelphia, whose territory in Pennsylvania, Delaware and South Jersey contains an estimated 170,000 Mexicans. "Nothing now can be assumed about this proposal."

The advocates urged immigrants who think they have been victimized to contact a community association or consulate.

They added that undocumented immigrants should be careful about approaching suburban or rural police departments. Though Philadelphia bars its police from detaining people solely on immigration violations, others municipalities do not.

"Some of the [police officers] are anti-immigrant," said Art Read, general counsel of the Friends of Farmworkers, also based in Philadelphia. "Outside Philadelphia, contact us first."

Read did not mention any towns by name.

One local prosecutor who is outspoken against illegal immigration, Northampton County District Attorney John Morganelli, said he would not detain an illegal immigrant who tried to report a serious crime.

"I probably would defer prosecution of the illegal alien immigrant and ask that they cooperate with us," Morganelli said.

Local authorities may prosecute over fake IDs or unlicensed legal advice, but only the federal government can charge immigrants with entering the country illegally.

Contact staff writer Thomas Ginsberg at 215-854-4177 or tginsberg@phillynews.com.

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