



News Release

Attorney General Robert E. Cooper, Jr.

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ATTORNEY GENERAL SUES WOMAN, BUSINESS FOR ALLEGED MISLEADING ADS, PROMOTING "INTERNATIONAL DRIVER'S LICENSES"

Tennessee Attorney General Bob Cooper has filed suit against a woman and her business previously located in Nashville for allegedly using misleading advertisements promoting the sale of "international driver's licenses," and using the term "notario publico" without the required disclaimer.

Attorney General Cooper filed the lawsuit on behalf of the Division of Consumer Affairs, naming Mirella Garcia, individually and doing business as Centro de Apoyo al Immigrante. The lawsuit alleges she violated the Tennessee Consumer Protection Act and the Notaries Public statute. The business was previously located at 2517 Nolensville Pike in Nashville.

The Attorney General's Office discovered advertisements published in two Spanish language newspapers. The ads promoted the sale of "International Driver's Licenses," which are not a valid form of identification and serve no legal purpose. The so-called international license should not be confused with the legitimate "International Driver's Permit, which is a translation of a valid U.S. driver's license into different languages for foreign travel.

The U.S. Department of State has authorized only two companies to issue valid International Driver's Permits: the American Automobile Association (AAA) and the American Automobile Touring Alliance (AATA.) These organizations currently charge \$10 for the permit and are only allowed to provide them to people who are 18 years old or older and hold a valid driver's license issued by a U.S. state or territory.

"We are concerned that consumers are being deceived into believing that these so-called licenses are valid for driving and as identification," said Attorney General Bob Cooper. "They are not and those who use them are putting themselves at risk."

The advertisements also stated Centro de Apoyo was a "notario publico" but did not include the required disclaimer. The Spanish translation of "notary public" is "notario publico," or in the plural "notarios publicos." In many Spanish-speaking countries, a notario publico is a civil-law notary or an attorney who has been specially appointed to oversee certain common, everyday transactions. As a result, consumers often believe these individuals and the related transactions involve a higher level of trust and accuracy.

Some businesses are targeting Spanish-speaking consumers by advertising themselves as "notarios publicos" when they are merely offering notary public services. Under Tennessee law, a notary public who is not licensed to practice law in Tennessee and advertises their services as a notary public must include in all advertisements the following disclaimer in English and the language used

in the ad: "I AM NOT AN ATTORNEY LICENSED TO PRACTICE LAW IN THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, AND I MAY NOT GIVE LEGAL ADVICE OR ACCEPT FEES FOR LEGAL ADVICE."

Consumers are encouraged to check with the Tennessee Board of Professional Responsibility to confirm that an individual is licensed and in good standing to practice law before hiring someone to provide legal services.

"We encourage anyone who has purchased an international driver's license or has had problems with this individual or business or any other business to contact our office to file a complaint," said Mary Clement, director of the Division of Consumer Affairs.

Consumers may call the Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs at 1-800-342-8385 (toll free inside Tennessee) or (615) 741-4737 or online at www.state.tn.us/consumer. To see a copy of the State's filings, go to www.attorneygeneral.state.tn.us and then click on Filings of Interest. For more information on International Driving Permits, visit the U.S. Department of State's website at http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety_1179.html.