

# FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer and Business Education

## Green Card Lottery Scams

Washington, D.C. -- If you or someone you know is trying to obtain a green card — the right to live permanently in the United States — be on the alert for unscrupulous businesses and attorneys who claim that, for a fee, they can increase your chances of winning the U. S. State Department's annual green card lottery.

Each year the State Department conducts a green card lottery through its diversity visa program to distribute applications for 50,000 immigrant visas. Winners of the lottery have a chance to apply for an immigrant visa, which can be used to enter the U.S. **Winners are selected randomly and there is no fee to enter the lottery.** If the winner files a successful application, he or she can enter the U.S. and exchange the immigrant visa for a green card, issued by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). If the winner is in the U.S. already, he or she can get a green card from INS without leaving the country.

### The Scam

Some businesses and attorneys use misrepresentations and unfair practices to promote services to consumers who hope to win a chance to apply for a green card through the lottery program. Among the deceptions scam artists use are statements that:

- they are affiliated with the U.S. Government;
- special expertise or a special application form is required to enter the lottery;
- their company never has had a lottery entry rejected; and
- their company can increase an applicant's chances of "winning" the lottery.

In addition, some fraudulent companies jeopardize an applicant's opportunity to participate in the lottery by filing multiple entries; and try to force lottery-winning applicants to pay substantial fees to complete the visa and green card application process. A delay in processing a winner's application can kill their chances for a green card because the State Department selects more winners than there are visas available. The State Department awards visas to winners on a first-come, first-served basis.

## Protecting Yourself

The best way to protect yourself from green card lottery scam artists is to understand how the State Department's lottery works.

- Entering the green card lottery is straightforward and costs nothing. You can enter on your own by following the instructions available from the State Department or your local consumer affairs office. There is no entry form. Hiring an attorney or company to enter the lottery for you is your decision.
- Do not submit more than one entry. If you do, you will be disqualified automatically.
- No special techniques or loopholes are available to increase your chances of winning the green card lottery. **Selection of entries in the lottery is random.**

For more information about the State Department's green card lottery, contact the U.S. Department of State Hotline at 900-884-8840. The cost of the call is \$5.10. You also may access the State Department at **travel.state.gov** on the Internet. If you think you are the victim of a green card lottery scam, contact the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov) or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.



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