

Milford lawyer to offer immigration services

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A Milford lawyer is bringing immigration legal services to the increasingly diverse town of Milford during uncertain times for undocumented immigrants, making her office the only one based in Milford offering immigration legal services.

Attorney Melanie Soloman is now offering the services through her law office thanks to the recent hire of a trilingual attorney skilled in immigration law. Many law offices specializing in immigration serve Milford clients, but none are based in Milford, according to Soloman.

Currently, immigrants in Milford caught up in immigration legal troubles have to seek the services of attorneys in Framingham or Worcester. Since most of them are undocumented, they can't get drivers licenses and can't drive, Soloman said.

Soloman works out of her Main Street office and focuses on criminal defense and divorce cases, but she recently represented undocumented immigrants in local district courts. Several of her clients now find themselves subject to deportation proceedings.

Milford is becoming increasingly diverse, with several thousand South American immigrants moving to the area in recent decades. A large number of them are undocumented.

“(Immigrants) look for someone local and established in the community,” she said.

On Saturday, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Soloman is opening her office to invite immigrants to meet with attorneys, including Eloa Celedon, a Brazilian native and licensed attorney who speaks Portuguese, Spanish and English. She was recently hired by Soloman to offer immigration law services to her clients.

Soloman acknowledged the growing immigrant population in Milford and the fact that some residents are reluctant to accept them into the community.

“At the end of the day, these folks need a service,” she said. “Immigration law exists for a reason.”

Susan Church, an experienced immigration attorney and chair of the American Immigration Lawyers Association New England Chapter said immigration law is one of the most complicated legal practices.

It’s also one of the highest area of Bar complaints, she said.

Case law, lawmakers and administrations are “constantly messing with immigration law,” she said.

“It’s a really complicated area of law and it’s filled with major pitfalls for lawyers,” she said.

Church, an immigration lawyer for more than 20 years, said she still calls people for legal advice.

“It’s just that complicated,” she said.

Peter Elikann, a veteran criminal defense attorney and member of the Massachusetts Bar Association, said immigration law has been trending for about a decade, but has increased even more in recent days with given the tough stance on immigration from Washington.

“Immigration law and criminal law are now so inextricably intertwined that you almost can’t separate them much of the time,” he said.

Clients of criminal lawyers - if non-citizens - can be deported and “ripped away from their families” if lawyers aren’t versed in immigration law.

Non-citizens charged with a crime face a whole new set of immigration challenges and therefore, they must retain an attorney with some experience in the field, but that can be costly if they’re forced to retain two different lawyers.

“It’s absolutely crucial that every person who’s charged with a criminal offense - if they’re not a citizen - must get a lawyer who has some knowledge of immigration law,” he said.

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