



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF TULARE

Tim Ward, *District Attorney*

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The Office of the District Attorney wants to make our citizens aware of foreclosure scams and help them avoid being a victim. The possibility of losing a home to foreclosure can be terrifying; the reality that scam artists are preying on desperate homeowners is equally frightening.

California ranks third in the nation for mortgage fraud and these victims stand to lose their life savings, homes, and credit. In these challenging financial times, homeowners are more vulnerable than ever to opportunistic criminals who seek to manipulate a desperate situation to their advantage by engaging in real estate and foreclosure fraud.

Tulare County ranked 19th in the nation for foreclosure-filing rates in 2010. In 2011, as a response to this startling information, the Office of the District Attorney began a collaborative partnership with the California Attorney General's Office to better protect the citizens of Tulare County.

In 2012, the District Attorney's Office was selected as one of 14 agencies statewide to receive additional funding from the Attorney General's Office to alleviate foreclosure fraud. Beyond investigating and prosecuting those who victimize the financially vulnerable, our objective is to also educate homeowners to achieve early intervention and prevention of fraud.

Before a home goes into foreclosure, a Notice of Default is issued. Throughout 2011 and 2012, 6,415 notices of default were issued in Tulare County. Scammers prey upon the vulnerable homeowners receiving this notice, accessing public information to obtain their names and addresses. The most common crime committed by these scammers is loan modification fraud.

Many individuals and companies claim they can get a change to the home loan, "a modification," that will reduce the monthly mortgage payment or take other steps to save the home. Unfortunately, many of these individuals and companies use half-truths and even outright lies to sell their services. They promise relief, but don't deliver. In some cases, homeowners lose their homes, despite paying for services.

Any individual or business that does any of the following may be committing foreclosure fraud, and should be reported immediately:

- Asks for a fee in advance for any services (unless it is a licensed lawyer, you should never pay anyone up front for services)
- Tells you *not* to contact your lender, lawyer or credit counselor
- Insists you make your mortgage payments directly to them while they negotiate with the lender
- Tells you to transfer your property deed or title to them
- Guarantees to get you a loan modification or stop the foreclosure process - - no matter your circumstances
- Offers to buy your house for cash for much lower than the selling price of similar houses in your neighborhood
- Pressures you to sign papers you haven't had the chance to read thoroughly or that you don't understand.

Additionally, residents in our County who are at risk of default or need assistance navigating the foreclosure process may obtain counseling, free of charge, from these local agencies:

CSET
(559) 741-4646

Self-Help Enterprise
(559) 412-0828

If you think you've been a victim of a foreclosure scam, or have been approached by someone offering any of the services above, please contact the District Attorney's **Foreclosure Fraud/Real Estate Unit at (559) 623-0250.**

Tim Ward
District Attorney