



San Diego City Attorney Jan I. Goldsmith

NEWS RELEASE

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Woman Pleads Guilty to Unlicensed Practice of Law *San Diego City Attorney's Office recovers full restitution for victims*

San Diego, CA: Stephanie Strong, who is also known by the last names "Green," "Overstreet" and "McKinney", is a 46 year old woman from San Diego who pleaded guilty on August 30, 2012, and was sentenced today in San Diego Superior Court, on two misdemeanor counts: practicing law without a license and misleading advertising. She was placed on three years of probation; she has paid the victims \$4,035 and will also pay a court fine of \$750.

The Consumer and Environmental Protection Unit of the San Diego City Attorney's Office initially received a complaint from a Georgia attorney who was concerned that Stephanie Strong, who operated Always Affordable Legal Assistance and A1 Divorce & Paralegal Assistance, was giving legal advice. The City Attorney's investigation revealed that Strong advertised on the web as an "Independent" paralegal and had negotiated child custody, divorce and bankruptcy matters in California and Georgia. She promised the victims assistance that she could not legally perform and charged them for her services.

"Unauthorized practice of law will not be tolerated." said City Attorney Jan Goldsmith. "We will continue to go after those that mislead the system."

In California there is no such thing as an "Independent Paralegal." Consumers should never directly pay a paralegal for legal work. A paralegal is limited to being employed by a lawyer or contracting directly with a lawyer. The paralegal must operate under the direct supervision of a lawyer. The California State Bar licenses lawyers and maintains a website where consumers may check the status of a lawyer at <http://www.calbar.ca.gov>

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California has recognized Legal Document Assistants since 2000. A Legal Document Assistant may help individuals who are representing themselves in court; fill out documents and file those documents in court. A Legal Document Assistant cannot select a form for his/her client, negotiate with the opposing side or discuss legal strategy. Legal Document Assistants must be registered with the county clerk in the county where they do business and must be bonded.

The Consumer and Environmental Protection Unit of the San Diego City Attorney's Office has a Consumer Help Line at (619) 533-5600. For more consumer tips and information on California legal practitioners check out the Consumer News on the City Attorney's webpage, [Newsletters | Office of the City Attorney](#)

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