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-PRESS RELEASE-

MERRILL PRAISES HOUSE PASSAGE OF BILL PROHIBITING NON-ATTORNEYS FROM ADVERTISING THEMSELVES AS 'NOTARIO PUBLICO'

SECRETARY OF THE STATE: MEASURE WILL REDUCE CONFUSION IN SPANISH-
SPEAKING COMMUNITIES OVER PERFORMANCE OF LEGAL SERVICES; IMPOSES
PENALTIES FOR UNLICENSED PRACTICE OF LAW

HARTFORD: Secretary of the State Denise Merrill today praised the Connecticut State House of Representatives passage of House Bill No. 5513 "An Act Concerning the Unauthorized Practice of Law by Notaries Public" which is designed to reduce fraudulent representation of legal services in Spanish-speaking communities by Notaries Public who advertise themselves as a "Notario Publico" in Spanish. In many Spanish-speaking countries, a "*notario publico*" is authorized to perform certain services that in the United States are reserved to licensed attorneys. There have been numerous complaints that a number of notaries public in Connecticut have been advertising themselves as a *Notario Publico* in Spanish, potentially leaving the impression with unwitting clients that the notaries can perform certain legal duties – such as assistance with immigration matters – that would amount to practicing law without a license.

"I commend the House of Representatives for taking a step that I hope will reduce confusion in the Hispanic community as to who is allowed to practice law," said Secretary Merrill, whose office oversees the licensing and discipline for Notaries Public in Connecticut. "I urge the state Senate to take up this measure as soon as possible so we can clarify that only a licensed attorney can perform certain functions such as provide legal advice on immigration matters. It is very important for the Spanish-speaking public to understand: a *Notario Publico* is not necessarily a Notary Public or an attorney licensed to practice law in Connecticut."

House bill No. 5513, if passed by the State Senate and signed into law by Governor Malloy, would prohibit a notary public from offering or providing legal advice in immigration matters, or representing someone in immigration proceedings, unless the notary public is (1) an attorney

admitted to the Connecticut bar or (2) authorized by federal regulations to practice immigration law or represent people in immigration proceedings. The bill also prohibits a notary public from assuming, using, or advertising the title of *notario* or *notario publico* unless he or she (1) is an attorney admitted to the Connecticut bar or (2) indicates in an advertisement or otherwise provides written notice that he or she is not a state-licensed attorney. Under the bill, any notary public who violates these provisions is deemed to have violated the prohibition on the unauthorized practice of law and is subject to the penalties that apply to unauthorized practice of law. If enacted, the bill would take effect on October 1, 2013.