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CMS continues to support and bring hope to the most vulnerable

This Summer, Catholic Migration Services continued to stand alongside low-income immigrants, tenants and workers facing extraordinary challenges, from workplace discrimination to navigating complex immigration systems. In this issue, we share stories that demonstrates CMS's unwavering commitment and dedication to supporting the immigrant community and delivering justice for all, regardless of ethnicity or religion.

Our work goes beyond the courtroom. In recent months, we have hosted clinics, where we provided a range of services, including assistance with asylum applications and work permits, as well as preparation for hearings. We also participated in two presentations to share important legal updates for immigrant communities.

Every story in this issue is a testament that when justice is pursued with courage, and community comes together with compassion, hope prevails.

Leyla's Fight for Justice - A Win for Working Mothers



Leyla spent years showing up every day for her job as a receptionist. She worked hard, earning just the minimum wage an hour in cash. Whenever Leyla had to call out due to unavoidable reasons, such as caring for her daughter, her employer would punish her by changing her schedule.

Almost two years ago, she was abruptly fired after missing a shift due to a medical emergency. What hurt her the most wasn't just the job loss, but the words from management that still echoed in her mind: ***"We need someone more reliable—someone who doesn't have kids."***

Leyla knew that wasn't just unfair, it was discrimination. She reached out to Catholic Migration Services, and we took her case seriously. What followed was a legal fight for justice. Through persistence, advocacy, and Leyla's courage, CMS secured almost **\$40,000 settlement** on her behalf for job discrimination. She is planning to spend her settlement money on her daughter's education.

Leyla's story is not unique. Too many working mothers, especially women of color in low-wage jobs, face impossible choices between caring for their families and keeping their jobs. At CMS, we stand with workers like Leyla because no one should be penalized or overlooked for being a parent.

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We need someone reliable - someone who doesn't have kids"

Ana's Journey to Citizenship - It's Never Too Late

Ana originally from Haiti first came to the United States on February 25, 1994, after her husband, a lawful permanent resident, petitioned for her. Through consular processing, she entered the United States with an immigrant visa and received her green card as the spouse of a lawful permanent resident. Since then, she has lived a steady and law-abiding life in the U.S.



Ana worked for 12 years at a laundry company and is actively involved in the Eben-Ezer Haitian Baptist Church in Brooklyn, as well as in her local community. She has successfully maintained her permanent residency for over three decades.

In May 2024, she contacted Catholic Migration Services for assistance with the naturalization application process. Ana qualified for an exemption that allows older adults who are 65 years or older and have lived in the U.S for at least 20 years to take the test in their respective language.

Throughout the naturalization application process, she was eager to complete every step and enthusiastically participated in an optional workshop hosted by CMS to support her through the interview process. In May of this year, she accomplished a significant milestone at the age of 73: she became a naturalized U.S.

Carlos and Maria's Immigration Journey

Carlos and Maria married in 2006, in their native country of Colombia, and share a deep bond as husband and wife. Carlos was forced to leave Maria in 2011 to journey to the United States to seek asylum on the basis of political asylee. He was finally granted asylum in 2012, and his journey peaked when he became a U.S. citizen in 2018. Their son, Luis, also a U.S citizen, took the brave step to petition his mother, Maria, to join the family in the U.S.



However, Maria could not be reunited with her husband and son because of some inaccurate information in her application years earlier.

In order to enter the United States, Maria needed what is called a “hardship waiver.” With compassion and dedication, CMS

stepped in to help Maria in the complex application process for a waiver based on hardship to her husband Carlos. He had endured years of separation from Maria because of her inability to enter the U.S, at the same time, his status as an asylee prevented him from returning to Colombia.

To add to their struggles, Carlos lost his job during the COVID pandemic and was diagnosed with a medical condition which made him prone to suffer a stroke, leaving him in desperate need of Maria’s support.

After a long and challenging journey, hope prevailed when the hardship waiver was finally granted. The family is now happily reunited, ready to embrace the future with hope, faith and unity.

Volunteer Spotlight

Meet Haydee - A Story of Connection, Empathy and Resiliency

Haydee joined CMS as a volunteer in January 2024 and since then has become an invaluable part of our team. Whether she’s conducting naturalization prescreening, translating documents, interpreting for clients, or assisting with administrative tasks, Haydee brings unmatched dedication and warmth to everything she does.

Haydee immigrated to the United States from Cuba with her family when she was 12. She is a gifted linguist who speaks English, Spanish, French, and a bit of German. Her professional career began in the corporate world, but a lifelong calling led her to education.

She spent nearly 50 years as a math teacher, often educating the daughters of former students, hence leaving a profound impact on generations of learners. She is a woman of deep faith and compassion; Haydee is an active member of the St. Frances de Sales Association.

Her path to CMS was shaped by personal loss and legacy. Following the passing of her husband, a devoted immigration and human rights attorney at Catholic Charities of New York (CCCS), Haydee was invited to volunteer by Raluca and Ceci (Program Supervisor and Administrative Supervisor, respectively), who were former colleagues of her late husband, Mark R. von Sternberg. Since then, she has found comfort and purpose in continuing the work her husband devoted his life to.

One of the most touching moments throughout her time at CMS occurred during a naturalization prescreening call. As she was speaking with the applicant about his background, she discovered that this person had obtained his green card years earlier through CCCS—with Haydee’s late husband serving as his advocate. It was a full-circle moment that reminded her of the lasting impact their family has had on immigrant communities. For Haydee, CMS is a place of hope, and she is inspired by how clients are treated—with dignity, empathy, and respect. In her words: *“There should be 200 more CMS.”*

We are deeply grateful for Haydee’s time, passion, and unwavering commitment. Her story is a testimony to the powerful ways in which one person can uplift a community.



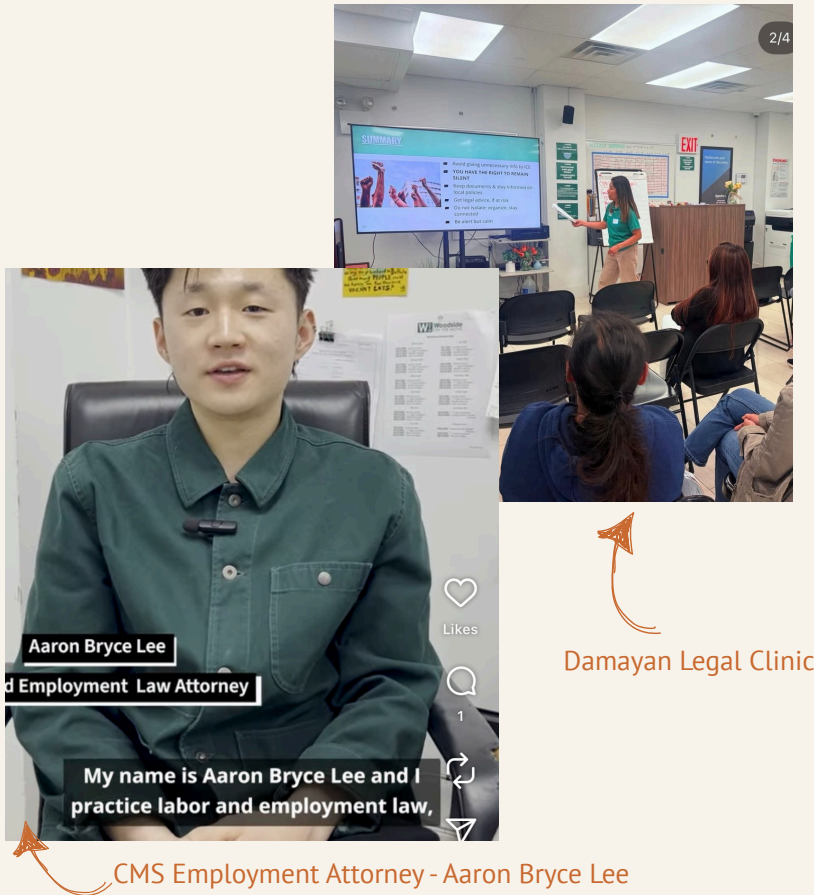
Left to Right: Ceci, Haydee and Raluca

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***CMS is a place of hope,
there should be 200
more CMS.***

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Community Events



CMS proudly participated in the Damayan Legal Clinic on May 31st, providing vital information on employment rights and one-on-one consultations.

In anticipation of this event, CMS employment attorney, Aaron Bryce Lee addressed the importance of legal clinics and common issues in the workplace through a special video on Instagram, helping us reach a broader community. We look forward to participating in additional clinics with our partners later this year!

CMS in the News!

On August 6th, 2025, New York Attorney General Letitia James and New York State Homes and Community Renewal (HCR) Commissioner Ruth Anne Visnauskas filed a lawsuit against Zara Realty for repeatedly violating rent-stabilization rules in Jamaica and Elmhurst, Queens. The lawsuit seeks to stop Zara Realty from collecting unlawfully inflated rents and to secure refunds for tenants.

Catholic Migration Services (CMS) has long supported tenants living in Zara-managed buildings. We have been working with them to document violations and demand accountability. *“Zara must be held responsible for ongoing violations and the hardship so many families.”* said Carlos Ortiz, CMS Tenant Organizer.

CMS thanks Attorney General’s Office for taking action and continues to call for stronger protections to safeguard tenants from landlords who disregard their legal obligations. [Read the Attorney's General's Press Release here!](#)

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS:
DAMAYAN MIGRANT WORKERS' ASSOCIATION
VIA

Support our work with a tax deductible donation!



Save the Date!

A poster for the 2025 Shining Star Celebration. The background is white with a dense pattern of gold stars. The text is centered and reads: "CATHOLIC MIGRATION SERVICES" with a cross logo, "PROMOTING JUSTICE AND COMPASSION", "2025 SHINING STAR Celebration" in large blue and gold letters, "JOIN US THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6TH, 2025 6 PM - 10 PM", "GARGIULO'S CONEY ISLAND, BROOKLYN", and a link "TO PURCHASE TICKETS AND SPONSORSHIPS CLICK HERE". Two circular inset photos are on the right: the top one shows a priest and a man holding an award, and the bottom one shows a family of four.