

# CATHOLIC MIGRATION SERVICES

## NEWSLETTER SUMMER, 2023



WE HELP OUR NEIGHBORS FIGHT DEPORTATION, ADJUST THEIR LEGAL STATUS IN THE U.S., BECOME U.S. CITIZENS, AVOID EVICTIONS, AND RECOVER STOLEN WAGES. THIS PAST YEAR, WE SERVED OVER 6,000 NEW YORKERS WITH IMMIGRATION, HOUSING, AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, PLUS PROVIDED COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION TO AN ADDITIONAL 7,000!

As of last spring, over 65,000 migrants from the southern border have arrived in New York City. Catholic Migration Services is a member of the Pro Se Plus Project (PSPP), a collaboration of community-based organizations and legal services providers addressing the pressing legal needs of new immigrants in New York City - check out the website [here](#). PSPP provides immigration relief to new migrants through legal orientations, screenings, triage, and pro se assistance with applications for asylum, employment authorization, and immigration court motions.

On World Refugee Day, June 20th, Catholic Migration Services held a legal clinic for new arrivals at the NYC Navigation Center in Midtown, screening and providing legal advice to 36 individuals and families from several countries. Thank you to the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) and pro bono lawyers and volunteers from AIG, Marsh McLennan, the Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens (CCBQ) Office of Mission and New York Legal Assistance (NYLAG).

**GET INVOLVED - GET HELP - GIVE HELP**

# WINNING ASYLUM FOR FAMILY WHO FLED VIOLENCE IN HAITI

Every one of the 102 immigrants we defended from deportation this year has a story. Here is one: The Pierres\* were a couple in Haiti whose work on a political campaign put their lives in danger. They fled their homeland and made the journey to the U.S. Along the way, they had a son, Francis. The entire family was fast-tracked for removal from the United States, despite their lives being at risk if they returned to Haiti. We filed hundreds of pages of evidence proving the past persecution of Mr. and Mrs. Pierre and the terrifying fate they worried awaited them if they returned. The judge and prosecutor agreed that the record showed the family's case warranted asylum. The family - including little Francis, now 5 years old - was granted asylum, giving them protection and security after years of living in fear. They can now apply to bring Francis' older sister to the U.S. so the family can be reunited.

\*not their real names

## HOW DO YOU SAY "U.S. CITIZEN" IN AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE?

Catholic Migration Services has helped many New Yorkers who use American Sign Language (ASL) become U.S. citizens. Between referrals from Bronx Independent Living Services and personal recommendations, we have provided legal services to dozens who are hearing impaired, including attending several citizenship interviews where we ensured access to ASL interpretation services in preparing paperwork and at United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) offices.



## FROM "DACA" TO "GREEN CARD"

Over the past year, we have helped 65 young immigrants renew their Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status, preventing their removal from the only home they have known and enabling them to work lawfully in the U.S. We helped one New Yorker finally obtain his Permanent Residency, 22 years after arriving in the United States. Pedro was brought from Mexico when as a baby and growing up in Queens, he didn't even know he had no legal status. In high school, he found out he qualified for DACA and he got employment authorization. When he graduated, became an electrician with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

But every two years he had to renew his authorization and was fearful that the program would be discontinued, making him illegible to work in the U.S. and forcing him to return to Mexico, where he knows no one. In 2016, his mother got permanent residency through her older son, and she filed a petition for Pedro. Three years later, it was approved. Then, pandemic interruptions caused an additional four year delay, he finally just got his "green card" and is able to travel freely and make long-term plans for his future.

## CITIZENSHIP AFTER DENIAL

Among the 295 people we have helped become U.S. citizens this year, one was especially challenging because her citizenship application had been denied years ago before she found us. We filed a motion to reopen and won her naturalization case. This month she finally had her oath ceremony and got her certificate of citizenship.





## **TENANT ADVOCACY PROGRAM MOBILIZES TENANTS TO FIGHT RENT HIKES AND EVICTIONS, AND TO WIN BUILDING REPAIRS**

Our lawyers recently recovered over \$30,000 for tenants who were overcharged rent, while the Tenant Advocacy Program mobilized against rent increases at the annual Rent Guidelines Board Hearings affecting over one million rent-stabilized apartments city-wide.

Our organizers are successfully assisting the 28-18 39th Ave Tenant Association. Tenants went 8 months without cooking gas and sued their landlord for Harassment & Repairs with representation by NYLAG. Finally gas was turned back on. On June 13th for their pre-trial conference Tenants hosted a rally in front of Housing Court and didn't agree to settle and are currently prepping for trial in September! We will stand with them every step of the way.

Catholic Migration Services also helped prevent a disabled tenant from losing her home. She had been in a coma for 2 months after suffering a stroke. She was unaware that she had an active court case for rent arrears and failure to renew her lease, and her landlord had applied for a city Marshall to carry out her eviction. We were able to help her respond just in time to stop the Marshall, get her lease renewed and get her referred to Adult Protective Services to get her the assistance she needs. She's still in her home today.



**Congratulations to  
2023 Public Service Award honorees  
WilmerHale and Andrew Lehrer for  
outstanding pro bono work!**

Over the past year alone, Catholic Migration Services has helped low-wage immigrant workers recover over half a million dollars in unpaid wages from their employers. In one case, our Employment Law unit won an \$85,000 settlement for a restaurant worker who had been severely underpaid while working throughout the pandemic. Despite working 55 hours per week, our client was only paid around \$6 per hour, well below minimum wage and without any overtime premiums. The settlement we won is 100% of the wages owed, plus penalties and interest.

## RECOVERING UNPAID WAGES FOR AN ESSENTIAL WORKER

### WINNING OWED WAGES - AND A PATHWAY TO CITIZENSHIP

We recently received a call from someone whose employer was not paying him and even worse, was threatening to report him to immigration officials because he asked for his owed wages. First, we helped him file a claim with the New York State Department of Labor for abusive working conditions. But we didn't stop there. We helped him obtain crime witness/victim and trafficking victim visa certifications (U and T visas). Our Employment Law team connected him with our Immigration team and now we are also helping him obtain lawful immigration status with a pathway to citizenship. He was just one of the 72 New Yorkers we helped to gain documented status in the last year alone, so they can live and work safely in the U.S. without fear.

#### Pro Se Plus Project covered in

- [Documented: As Title 42 Expires, New York Immigrant Advocates Keep Working](#)

#### Housing Team covered in

- [The Jackson Heights Post: We deserve a good quality of life': Tenants of Jackson Heights apartment building demand safe living conditions](#)
- [CBS News: Queens residents in rent-stabilized buildings take aim at Zara Realty, claim tenant abuse](#)

## IN THE NEWS

