

CATHOLIC MIGRATION SERVICES

2023 – 2024

Report

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Catholic Migration Services (CMS) increased access to justice for thousands of low-income immigrant households in New York City. Our primary target population of low-income immigrants sought our services to avoid deportation, obtain work authorization, become naturalized citizens, fight eviction, improve conditions in their homes, recovers unpaid wages, and fight workplace discrimination. This population’s ability to obtain legal assistance to address these issues is challenged by their language limitations and unfamiliarity with the U.S legal system. We helped our clients overcome these barriers by providing multilingual free legal services, including brief advice, pro-se services, and full representation to immigrants on immigration, employment, and housing matters. From April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024, CMS accomplished the following:

- Closed 2,786 cases.
- 7,034 individuals benefitted from receiving CMS legal services.
- Conducted 3,811 new immigration, housing, and employment intakes, a 39% increase from the prior fiscal year.
- Helped 287 immigrants become naturalized U.S. citizens.
- Defended 160 immigrants in their removal proceedings.
- Helped 161 immigrants to adjust their legal status keeping families intact for some or ensuring the personal safety of others.
- Helped 89 young immigrants renew DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), thereby preventing their removal from the US and enabling them to work lawfully.
- Provided Pro-Se immigration services to 420 new immigrants.



Service Area: New York City

Population Served: Low Income Immigrant Populations

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

Total Staff: 54	Lawyers: 25
Paralegals: 12	Others: 17

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

Case Example #1: Carolina* and her husband Carlos* came to the United States after escaping violence in their native Colombia. Due to the violence, they suffered by the FARC, an armed Colombian rebel group, and the retaliation they experienced after reporting gang activity to the police, they were initially granted asylum by an immigration court. But the U.S. government counsel appealed, arguing that they were not credible because their asylum application did not provide sufficient details.

Carolina and Carlos were representing themselves in Immigration Court and came to CMS just days before a filing deadline. They had no idea what a legal brief was and didn't understand the scheduling order, which was in English only. CMS's legal team sprang into action to help them file the brief with the Board of Immigration Appeal by the deadline, so they have a chance to remain in the United States.

Case Example #2: Connie* worked 6 days a week at a laundromat but her employer was not paying her the legal minimum wage and overtime rates required by law. She took her boss to federal court to petition for her stolen wages to be returned to her but was struggling to press her claims without a lawyer.

After Catholic Migration Services stepped in to help, Connie won the \$50,000 of wages she was owed, plus the employer had to pay an additional \$5,000 for court fees and costs.

The settlement will help support Connie and the four generations of her family who live with her in East Elmhurst: her husband, two adult daughters, granddaughter, and her mother.

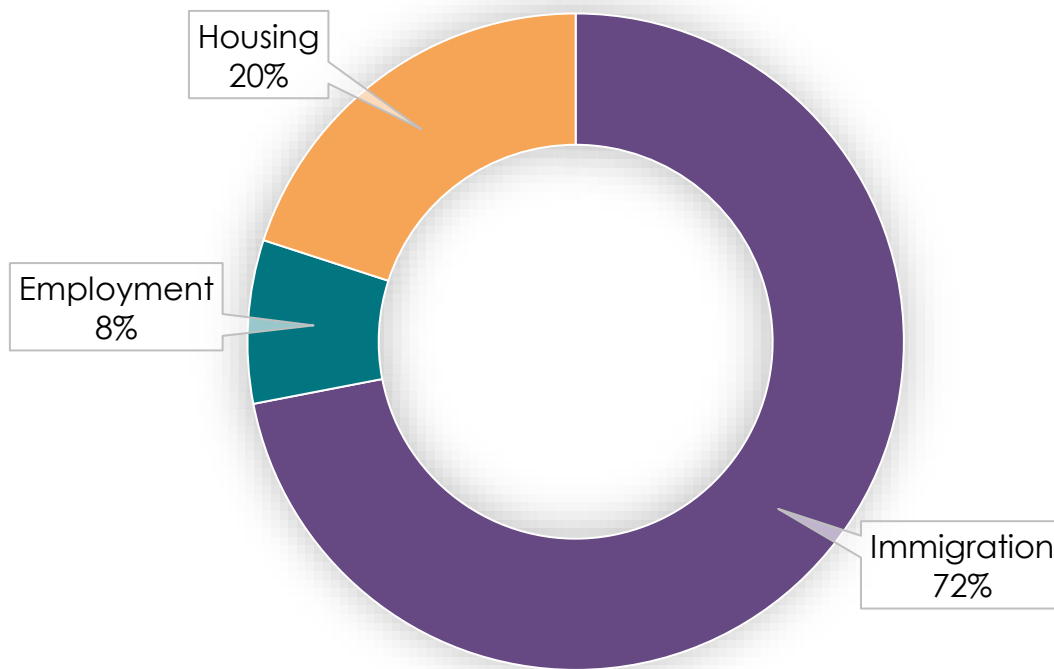
7,034

people
benefitted
from

2,786

legal cases
closed

CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

In partnership with Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens and our pro-bono partners, CMS also held over 40 legal clinics, presentations, and trainings over the last year that reached 3477 individuals. During these events, CMS staff informed communities of their rights, providing brief advice and assistance filling out various housing and immigration related applications.

Beginning in 2023, CMS' Pro-Se Plus team began holding clinics to screen and assist a large volume of asylum seekers. CMS built on existing relationships with New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) to recruit pro-bono volunteers, and AIG who have been partnering with CMS for naturalization clinics for many years. AIG recruited another corporate partner, Marsh McLennon, and together they coordinated CMS' first few screening clinics of newly arrived asylum seekers (3 clinics that screened 85 participants).

NYLPI opened dialogue between CMS and Simpson Thacher and Cleary Gottlieb about provision of pro se services through regular clinics. Last summer, CMS partnered with Simpson Thacher on a screening clinic with 41 participants and later at a clinic that assisted 32 asylum seekers with work permit applications. CMS also partnered with Cleary Gottlieb to help 22

newly arrived immigrants complete and file their asylum applications. In late 2023, we also partnered with Davis Wright Tremaine to conduct a naturalization clinic in October 2023 and followed up with a screening clinic for newly arrived immigrants in early 2024. These partnerships helped CMS develop a clinic model that has helped us provide vital services to a large volume of new arrivals.

Over the last year, our Workers' Rights team increasingly began interacting with the new migrant population. In coordination with our partners at Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens (CCBQ), our employment attorneys provided a series of Know Your Rights trainings to the new migrant community on areas including the minimum wage, overtime protections, workplace safety, workplace discrimination and harassment, and how to seek help if they experience these issues at work. At five clinics in Brooklyn churches and at a CCBQ WIC center, we reached over 130 new immigrants with vital information to protect themselves as new workers in New York City.

420

people
benefited
from
**Pro Se
Assistance**

3,477

people
benefited
from
**Community
Legal
Education**

IMPACT CASES

The class action suit, *Bernarez v. Alternate Staffing*, which has been going for seven years settled this past year for over 2.94 million dollars, which will be distributed to over 150 low-income home health aides who worked 24 hours shifts for disabled and elderly clients but were not paid properly.

TECHNOLOGY

CMS has worked to enhance one of our client databases, Legal Server, to continue to improve screening for our naturalization, employment, and tenant organizer programs. We have been working diligently for over a year on the development of our new website and are excited to unveil the new site before the end of the year.

IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

Between October 2023 to February 2024, CMS purchased 8 HP laptops for our staff that amounted to \$6,757.89. We would not have been able to purchase the same number of laptops without this grant. CMS used the difference of the \$10,000 technology grant towards our subscriptions to Adobe and Microsoft that support our staff's work. Both our Adobe and Microsoft subscriptions are based on the number of staff members using this product and on average CMS pays \$652 per month for Adobe subscriptions and \$295 per month for Microsoft subscriptions.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

CMS has an extensive network of pro-bono attorneys, law students, and other volunteers. We are grateful for our partnerships with law firms and corporations that allow us to bring costly and complicated litigation and help us complete a high volume of legal screenings and applications in community clinics. We receive assistance from the New York Lawyer for the Public Interest (NYLPI) to recruit law firm and corporate volunteers for our immigration and housing clinics. A total of 135 pro bono attorneys and 30 law students provided services to CMS clients during the past year. The assistance of these attorneys at a time when our services are in such demand allowed us to serve more clients and resulted in impactful beneficial outcomes for CMS clients as illustrated below.

This past year our immigration team held 14 clinics that provided assistance to 300 participants. We partnered with the following firms and corporations, AIG March, GAP, Nintendo, and the law firms, Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP, Cleary Gottlieb, and Davis Wright Tremaine. At these clinics, pro-bono volunteers assisted CMS staff in screening new migrants for immigration relief, complete pro-se naturalization, employment authorization, and temporary protective status applications.

During this period, our Housing team conducted two clinics at St. Sebastian church in Woodside, Queens to provide legal assistance to local senior and disabled tenants who are eligible to have their rents frozen. With the assistance of pro-bono lawyers from Accenture and AIG, we helped over 50 senior and disabled tenants fill out the necessary paperwork.

A total of 30 law student interns provided services to CMS over the past year. Each year we participate in the NYU Public Interest Career Fair where we interview law students for summer internships placements. During the summer, CMS holds an orientation for its summer legal intern class. Students work under the supervision of an attorney, receive regular check-in meetings with their supervisor and a final evaluation.

Together with pro bono counsel WilmerHale, Catholic Migration Services won a \$215,000 settlement for five delivery workers who had worked for a local chain of dim sum restaurants. The workers were organized by the Chinese Staff and Workers' Association, a group assisting primarily low-wage Chinese workers. Our clients typically worked six days per week, twelve hours per day, but in exchange received monthly salaries that fell far below the applicable minimum wage and did not include mandatory overtime premiums. CMS and WilmerHale filed a suit in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.

In September 2023, our Immigration program began hosting two college graduates from the Avodah Jewish Service Corps program. The volunteers, who are with us for a full year, undergo a rigorous 2-week in-house training program to prepare them to work, under attorney supervision, on citizenship applications and political asylum cases.

134attorneys volunteered **2,208** hours**30**law students volunteered **3,050** hours**71**other volunteers volunteered **1,378** hours

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

Pro-Se Plus Coalition: Catholic Migration Services is part of the Pro-Se Plus coalition that developed a pilot program to provide legal resources and assistance to the newly arrived migrant community, who have been unable to access traditional full representation immigration legal services. Together with UnLocal, Central American Legal Assistance (CALA), New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG), and community groups Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA) and MASA, CMS has held clinics, KYR presentations, and conducted legal screenings and pro-se assistance to the large volume of migrants who arrived in New York City in 2022. Over the year, PSPP collectively has held over 25 clinics.

LEAP Coalition: We are a member of the LEAP Coalition, which links 18 legal services providers in initiatives to increase the visibility of our work, share best practices, and develop collaborative trainings and other programming to improve the quality and reach of civil legal services for the poor. Over the past year, CMS benefited from our collaboration with other LEAP groups in a grant application to provide housing legal services. The LEAP coalition has also worked diligently over the last year on a full day conference for our collective staff on emerging legal issues and best practices that will be taking place in May 2024.

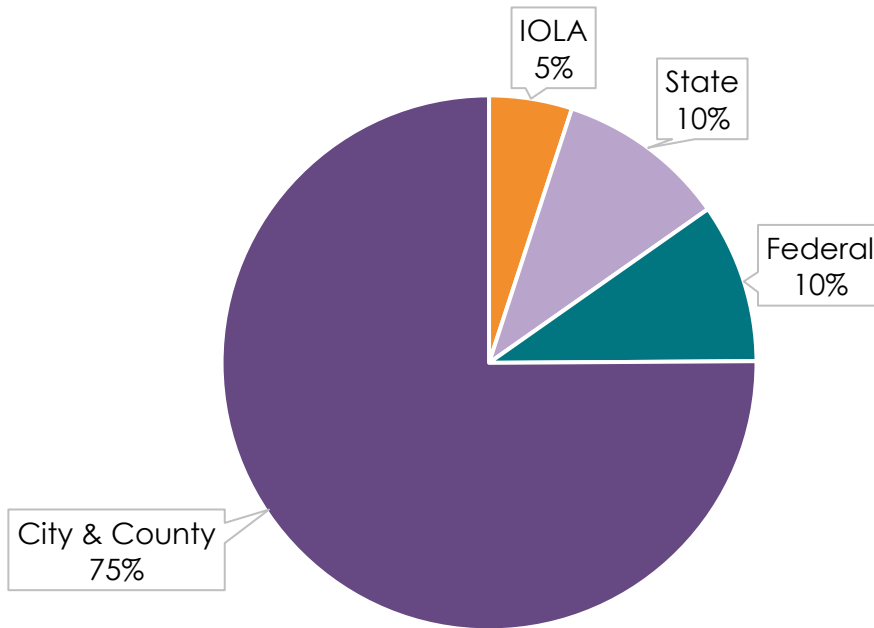
New York Lawyers for Public Interest: Together with New York Lawyers for Public Interest, we collaborate with various private law firms on immigration and SCRIE/DRIE application assistance. On April 27th and October 18th, CMS and NYLPI sponsored two workshops for elderly and disabled tenants to obtain assistance to have their rents frozen. We recruited and trained volunteers from AIG and Accenture to participate in both workshops. Similarly, with NYLPI assisting us in recruiting law firm volunteers, we held eight clinics to provide legal screenings and immigration application assistance.

Right to Counsel Coalition: Catholic Migration Services is very active in the Right to Counsel Coalition (RTC) which is made up of NYC tenant organizing groups, tenant advocates, law schools and other legal services organizations who work together to ensure safe and affordable housing for all New Yorkers. Over the past year, our tenant organizers have collaborated with RTC to educate tenants about their rights in housing court, including meeting with thousands of tenants in housing court to advise them of their right to have a free attorney to represent them in their eviction proceedings.

Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative: CMS belongs to Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative (CILEC), a team of six civil legal services providers and various immigrant-based CBOs. Through this collaboration, the legal services providers provide coordinated non-redundant legal services to underserved immigrant groups. In the applicable time period, our Workers’ Rights practice received 45 referrals from CILEC groups, including New Immigrant Community Empowerment (NICE), Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM), National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA), and Make the Road New York.

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

\$5,115,684



IOLA Funding	\$130,000
City & County Funding	\$ 1,946,455
State Funding	\$ 265,383
Federal Funding	\$ 75,000
Foundations	\$ 2,698,846