



Dear **Friends**,

As we step into the new year, I want to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude for your continued dedication and support of our mission at MidPenn Legal Services. The start of a new year is a time for reflection and renewal - an opportunity to embrace fresh beginnings, set new goals, and reaffirm our commitment to ensuring access to justice for all.

*We are thrilled to announce an exciting new chapter for MidPenn as our **Administration** and **Harrisburg Service Office** have officially moved to a new location at:*

100 North Cameron Street, Suite 401 West, Harrisburg, PA 17101

This move marks a significant milestone in our journey, enhancing our ability to serve the community more effectively and provide critical legal services to those in need. We are grateful for your support as we transition into this new space and continue our work in pursuit of justice and equity.

Looking back on the past year, we take pride in the incredible progress we've made - expanding our services, advocating for vulnerable populations, and breaking down barriers to justice. None of this would have been possible without the dedication of our staff, volunteers, donors, and community partners.

As we embark on 2025, we invite you to stay engaged and connected with us. Whether by attending our events, supporting our programs, or simply spreading the word about our work, your involvement remains vital to our success. Together, we can continue to make a lasting impact in the communities we serve.

Thank you for being an essential part of our journey and for standing with us as we work toward a future where justice is accessible to all.

Wishing you a healthy, successful, and inspiring new year!

*With heartfelt gratitude,
Rhodia D. Thomas, Esq.
Executive Director*

**Governor Shapiro Visits MidPenn
Legal Services to Address Rising**

Utility Costs



On January 29th, 2025, MidPenn Legal Services was honored to welcome Governor Josh Shapiro to our Harrisburg office as he highlighted his Administration's ongoing efforts to protect Pennsylvania consumers from rising utility costs. His visit followed a major announcement from the Office of the Governor of Pennsylvania, detailing a landmark agreement that will secure more than \$21 billion in savings for consumers over the next two years. This agreement will prevent

historic energy price hikes and ensure affordable, reliable electricity for households across the state.

Remarks were made from key legal advocates and community leaders: Rhodia D. Thomas, Esq., Executive Director, MidPenn Legal Services, Elizabeth Marx, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Utility Law Project, and Minta Livengood, Client Advocate and Board Member, CAUSE-PA. At MidPenn, we have long been committed to helping individuals and families navigate utility assistance programs and advocating for policies that protect vulnerable consumers from energy insecurity. Governor Shapiro's leadership in securing substantial savings for Pennsylvanians aligns with our mission to provide equitable access to justice and essential services for those in need. Read more about the press conference here: [PAcast](#)



MidPenn Legal Services Secures Landmark Ruling on Language Access in Pennsylvania Courts



On October 9, 2024, MidPenn Legal Services Staff Attorney Angélica Matías argued before Pennsylvania Superior Court Judges Bowes, Olson, and Stabile in the case of *Ortega v. Henriquez*—a critical appeal addressing the rights of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) litigants in judicial

proceedings.

MidPenn originally represented the plaintiff in a Protection From Abuse (PFA) case, but the trial judge denied him the use of a court-appointed interpreter during key parts of his testimony. Recognizing the serious due process violations this posed, MidPenn's legal team swiftly appealed the ruling.

The Pennsylvania Superior Court ruled in favor of MidPenn's client, holding that the trial judge's actions amounted to prejudicial error, requiring the lower court's decision to be vacated and remanded for new proceedings. In its ruling, the Court affirmed that Pennsylvania's Interpreter's Act protects individuals with "non-English speaking cultural backgrounds", ensuring their fundamental right to understand and communicate effectively in court. **Ortega v. Henriquez*, --A.3d--, 2025 PA Super 14, 4 (2025).

Initially, the Superior Court issued a non-precedential memorandum opinion, meaning its impact would be limited to this specific case. Understanding the broader implications for language access rights, MidPenn Legal Services pushed for publication to establish a binding precedent that could shape future rulings. Recognizing the case's significance, several legal advocacy organizations supported MidPenn's application for publication, including:

- ACLU of Pennsylvania
- Community Justice Project
- Justice at Work (formerly Friends of Farmworkers)
- Pennsylvania Interbranch Commission for Gender, Racial, and Ethnic Fairness
- Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network, Inc.

In its letter of support, the Interbranch Commission emphasized the case's public interest and the systemic barriers faced by LEP litigants, stating that the ruling was an "important opportunity to highlight systemic barriers to accountability in language access cases."

The ACLU of Pennsylvania echoed these sentiments, noting that the decision "clarifies the law regarding Pennsylvania judges' unstinting responsibility to engage interpreters for LEP parties and litigants." Furthermore, it stressed the ruling's potential to send a powerful message to courts statewide on the necessity of ensuring full participation for all litigants requiring language services.

This case underscores MidPenn Legal Services' commitment to advocating for the rights of non-English speaking litigants and ensuring equitable access to the judicial system. With this decision now precedential, it will help protect countless individuals facing language barriers in Pennsylvania courts, reinforcing the fundamental principle that justice must be accessible to all. Read the full opinion here : [J-A23022-24o - 106245111295212296.pdf](#)

Nick Matash Receives 2024 Public Service Award

Congratulations to MidPenn Managing Attorney, Nick Matash, on receiving the 2024 Excellence in Public Service Award for his remarkable dedication and contributions to public service.

On November 21, 2024, the Law and Government Institute at Widener University Commonwealth Law School celebrated the achievements of distinguished alumni and students, reflecting on a legacy of public service at the Capitol in Harrisburg.

Nick's unwavering dedication to advancing justice and his tireless efforts in supporting our community truly embody the values we uphold at MidPenn Legal Services. Join us in congratulating Nick on this outstanding achievement!



MidPenn LITC Secures Tax Court Victory for Senior Client

At MidPenn Legal Services, we are committed to ensuring that low-income individuals receive the legal representation they need to navigate complex tax issues. Recently, our Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC) successfully defended a 67-year-old client against a proposed IRS tax increase that could have significantly impacted his financial stability.

The issue arose when the client received a Form 1099-



C from a credit card company, indicating that \$29,000 of debt had been canceled in 2021. The IRS subsequently proposed an increase of \$7,800 to his federal tax liability for failing to report this cancellation of debt (COD) income on his 2021 tax return. However, what the IRS did not initially acknowledge was that several years prior, the client had won a default judgment against the credit card company in district court—with the help of another MidPenn attorney—effectively nullifying the debt.

Understanding the serious financial burden this tax increase would impose, Attorney Bob Hamilton took immediate action by filing a petition with the United States Tax Court. He argued that the client had a valid

legal defense and was not required to report the \$29,000 as taxable income. After reviewing the case, IRS attorneys agreed to a settlement, confirming that no changes would be made to the client's original 2021 tax return.

This case highlights the critical role MidPenn's LITC plays in protecting low-income taxpayers from unjust tax liabilities. Without legal representation, our client may have been forced to pay an unwarranted tax bill—a financial strain that could have had severe consequences for his well-being.

At MidPenn, we continue to fight for fairness and justice in tax matters, ensuring that our clients receive the advocacy they deserve. If you or someone you know is facing a tax-related issue, our Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic is here to help.

MidPenn Legal Services Engages Community at Adams County Farmers Market

On October 5, 2024, Nikki Sipe, Esq., Managing Attorney of the Gettysburg Office and Compliance Manager of the Telephone Advice Project, and Yinet Perez Vega, Esq., Staff Attorney and DEI Manager at MidPenn, actively participated in the Adams County Farmers Market to provide essential legal information and resources to the local community.

During the event, Nikki and Yinet engaged with community members, offering valuable insights about MidPenn, its wide range of services and provided answers to general questions about PA's legal system including the judicial branch, differences between civil and criminal law and process, potential expungement and pardon clinic, and answered other general questions. Yinet was able to reach out to the Spanish-speaking community, many of whom were previously unaware of the legal services available through MidPenn. The event attracted more than 400 attendees, including organizers, vendors, and resource partners from various local organizations, making it a successful platform for raising awareness and connecting with the diverse populations of Adams County.



Reading Office Hosts Successful Expungement Clinic in Collaboration with FirstEnergy for EmPOWERing Pro Bono Day

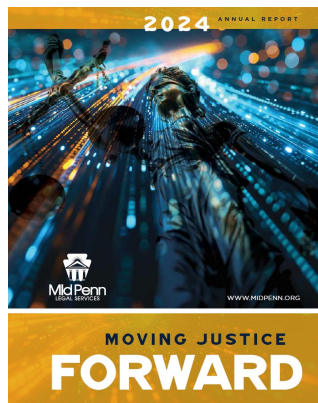
On November 14, 2024, the Reading Office of MidPenn Legal Services proudly hosted a small expungement clinic in partnership with attorneys from FirstEnergy, as part of the EmPOWERing Pro Bono Day initiative. The event provided critical legal assistance to 13 individuals, offering them the opportunity to navigate the expungement



process and work towards clearing their records. Of those served, four cases have been opened for extended services to provide further legal support and advocacy.

The clinic was made possible through the collaboration of dedicated legal professionals, including attorneys from FirstEnergy, and a representative from Morgan Lewis, who generously volunteered their time and expertise. In addition to volunteer attorneys, MidPenn Legal Services attorneys and administrative staff played an integral role in the clinic's success, ensuring that participants received personalized legal guidance and support.

A key community partner in this effort was the Berks County Pardon Project, represented by local pre-trial services provider ConnectionsWork, who provided valuable insights and resources to individuals seeking a fresh start through expungement and pardons. Their involvement underscored the collective commitment to expanding access to justice and second chances for those affected by past legal challenges.

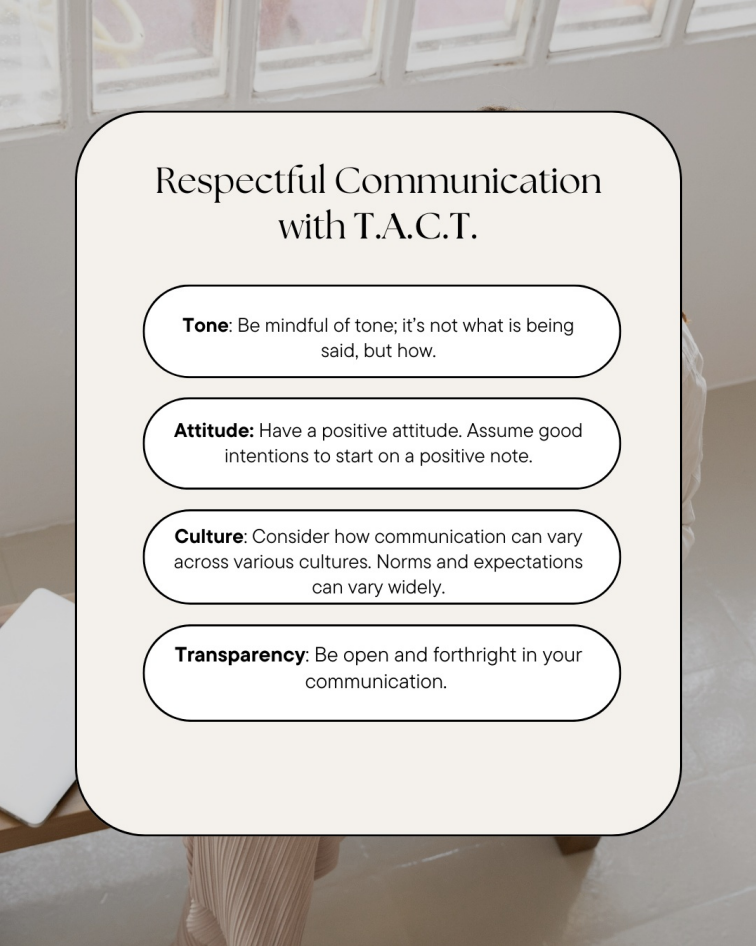


Juan, a resilient 77-year-old man, was facing the heartbreaking prospect of eviction from the low-income apartment he had called home for nearly a decade for a debt he did not owe.

You can read about Juan and how MidPenn helped him keep his home in our latest Annual Report.

[2024 Annual Report - Moving Justice Forward](#)

**Welcome to the Communication's Corner for
Practical Communication Tips**



Respectful Communication with T.A.C.T.

Tone: Be mindful of tone; it's not what is being said, but how.

Attitude: Have a positive attitude. Assume good intentions to start on a positive note.

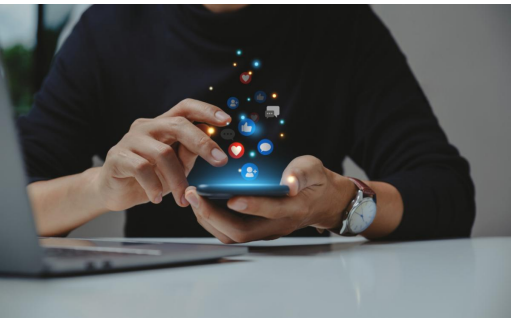
Culture: Consider how communication can vary across various cultures. Norms and expectations can vary widely.

Transparency: Be open and forthright in your communication.

Upcoming Events

Give Local York

Save the date! MidPenn will be participating in Give Local York on Friday, May 1 & 2, 2025. We will be raising funds to support the work we do on behalf of individuals and families in York County needing help with civil legal problems.



Follow Us

MidPenn is now on [BlueSky](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Linkedin](#), [Threads](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#).

Follow us for the latest information on our program and upcoming events.

For more information click here: [Events Calendar](#)

Harrisburg Service Office and Administrative Office.



NEW ADDRESS

100 NORTH CAMERON STREET
SUITE 401 WEST
HARRISBURG, PA 17101

For Services: **(800) 326-9177**

Administration: **(717) 234-0492**

To Apply for Services: **apply.midpenn.org**

www.midpenn.org

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MidPenn Legal Services is a private, nonprofit law firm providing free civil legal services to residents in these Pennsylvania counties: Adams, Bedford, Berks, Blair, Centre, Clearfield, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, Lancaster, Lebanon, Mifflin, Perry, Schuylkill and York. Contributions to MidPenn are tax-deductible as allowed by law. MidPenn Legal Services is a tax-exempt corporation under Internal Revenue Code 501(c)(3). The official registration and financial information of MidPenn Legal Services may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free, within Pennsylvania, 1 (800) 732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement. MidPenn may not expend funds for any activity prohibited by the Legal Services Corporation Act, 42 U.S.C..2996 et seq. or by Public Law 104-134. Public Law 104-134 §504(d) requires that notice of these restrictions be given to all funders of programs funded by the Legal Services Corporation.

Career Opportunities



MidPenn Legal Services | 100 North Cameron Street Suite 401 West | Harrisburg, PA 17101
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