



55 YEARS OF
ADVANCING JUSTICE

**New Jersey
Legal Services**

**55th Anniversary
Commemorative
Dinner**

December 8, 2022
The Addison Park
Aberdeen, New Jersey

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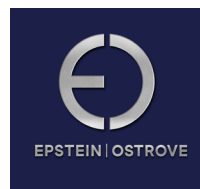


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The New Jersey Legal Services Fifty-Fifth Anniversary Commemorative Dinner

Good evening and welcome!

Thank you for joining us tonight to commemorate the 55th anniversary of Legal Services in New Jersey. In the 55 years since Legal Services first opened its doors in New Jersey, we have achieved major positive changes in every area of law that impacts low-income New Jerseyans; served over 8 million people in more than 2.7 million civil legal cases; and assisted millions more via impact cases, outreach, legislative and judicial advocacy, and an extensive array of free community legal and self-help resources.

First and foremost, I would like to recognize our statewide staff—now nearly 700 strong—who every day carry out the critical, desperately needed, and often life-altering work of Legal Services. I am amazed by your boundless compassion, your tireless dedication, and your zealous advocacy on behalf of low-income and vulnerable New Jerseyans. Whether you joined Legal Services this year or have been a part of this organization since its origins, thank you for dedicating your time, effort, and expertise to the cause of equal justice in New Jersey. You are an integral and invaluable part of an esteemed, expert, and highly effective legal services delivery system.

To our board members, donors, collaborators, and supporters across the state, we are deeply grateful for your partnership. The struggle against injustice is—and must be—a collective, concerted, community effort. Looking ahead, enormous challenges remain. On the heels of a pandemic that wreaked devastating and disproportionate harm on low-income and vulnerable New Jerseyans, we must all recommit to our shared mission: the pursuit of justice for all.

Under the leadership of co-founder and visionary Melville “De” Miller, Jr., our coordinated statewide system evolved from a humble network of storefront offices into a national model. While we honor De tonight via induction into the New Jersey Equal Justice Library and Archive “Circle of Honor,” the best way to honor De’s life and legacy is to continue to embrace and carry out the mission and values of Legal Services.

As we have since 1966, our programs will continue to fight to ensure access to justice for all disadvantaged people. We will continue to innovate, build and leverage expertise, and advocate vigorously for systemic and transformative change for people in poverty. Thank you for standing with us—for the past 55 years, in this current moment, and as we tackle the challenges ahead.

Dawn K. Miller, Esq.
President, Legal Services of New Jersey
December 8, 2022



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Deborah T. Poritz, 2011-2017

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This Evening's Proceedings

Invocation

The Reverend Bruce H. Davidson

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Cynthia M. Jacob, Esq.—LSNJ Board Chair

Dawn K. Miller, Esq.—LSNJ President

Video—Our Clients' Stories

Our Clients' Stories—The Difference We Make (video)

Remarks

The Honorable Stuart J. Rabner—Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court

Video—Our History

Advancing Justice—New Jersey Legal Services at 55 Years (video)

Original Poetry Reading

"A Social Justice Warrior"

Anisa Rahim, Esq.—MFA and LSNJ Vice President

Presentation of the NJEJLA Circle of Honor

Loretta Weinberg—Former Senate Majority Leader, New Jersey State Senate

Induction into the NJEJLA Circle of Honor

Melville D. Miller, Jr., Esq.—Do Well and Do Good (video)

Closing





QUALITY
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Rohrman '77

A Social Justice Warrior

For De Miller (1944-2021)

By Anisa Rahim

Let us speak of the man. A social justice warrior, slaying against inequity.
Evictions and welfare denials, wrongful terminations striking him at his core.
De argued gracefully and passionately in court to settle these scores.
Possessing a fierce need to protect, an uncanny ability
to look after those of various shades, speaking in many languages.

De could have done anything, they say, but he chose this work with his heart fully.
He was tall, towering, soft-spoken, each word selected carefully.
He had it all in him, turbulence and calm, curiosity and brilliance.
A reconciler of opposites, reveling in challenges and complications,
he took mischievous joy in surprising you with unexpected words and obscure references.

His memory was sharp so you had to be careful in what you stated.
You think he would not have had the time to listen but oh, he heard you.
De knew to ask the questions you had not considered.
Find the angles and weaknesses that others missed.
Even for a tribute, he would ask *how can I light a fire under you*.

Only De would have been uncomfortable with too much praise,
too much talk of a singular person and legacy.
He might have said I did just about everything I could.
Yet still, I wanted to do more.

Circle of Honor

Melville DeSoto (“De”) Miller, Jr.



Melville “De” Miller, Jr., co-founder and former president of Legal Services of New Jersey, was born in Summit, New Jersey in 1944 to Frances Weinpahl Miller and Melville DeSoto Miller. He grew up in Basking Ridge, New Jersey and was president and valedictorian of the first graduating class of Ridge High School in 1962. He graduated from Amherst College in 1966 and married Louise Sills Barton Miller that same year; he then went on to attain his JD from Harvard Law in 1969.

After graduating, Miller worked for a short time at a private law firm but the lure of public interest was too strong and he forever left private practice to join the State Office of Legal Services, then Middlesex County Legal Services, before helping to incorporate Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ) in 1973. He

then served as president and general counsel of LSNJ for nearly five decades, from 1974 to 2020, when, in his words, he “stepped aside” to make room for family life but vowed to stay involved in legal advocacy and the Poverty Research Institute, especially in issues related to child welfare. In the words of Alan W. Houseman, former executive director of the national nonprofit Center for Law and Social Policy,

De has been, not only a great leader in New Jersey, but one of the great leaders in legal aid in the United States. De not only created, in my view, the most comprehensive, integrated, and effective legal services system in the nation in New Jersey, but he also led efforts to improve performance and quality in the legal aid systems in the United States. He was the principle draftsman and the theorist behind the LSC performance measures, which are used not only by LSC, but by many state funders to set criteria for civil legal aid programs and to evaluate them. He also was the theoretical genius behind the justice gap study, which LSC did, and has done several times, to show the huge gap between the legal needs of low-income people and the ability of civil legal services to meet those needs.

John Tull, retired consultant and former director of the Legal Services Corporation Office of Program Operations, described Miller as “a giant of a man and a real force of nature,” emphasizing the important influence he had in the development of the legal services movement and, in particular, the cherished value of “high quality advocacy that aims at making a difference in changing policies and practices that negatively affect poor families, poor communities, poor individuals.”

And from Douglas S. Eakeley, LSNJ board member and former chair of the Legal Services Corporation, “He was truly passionate, not only about justice, but about having justice serve people in need. He was, with that passion, wonderfully empathetic as well. He was tireless. He was a crusader at heart. ... He had a vision that he was able to translate into a design, and then implement or build that design into a program, not just a program, but a program that is a national model for state support.”

Dawn K. Miller, De’s successor as president of LSNJ, describes De’s contributions to Legal Services as “immense.” He not only served as the founder and leader of Legal Services in New Jersey, but also—as either principal drafter, editor, or thought provoker—participated in nearly every Legal Services case that came before the New Jersey Supreme Court.

Central to De’s lasting legacy are the hundreds of lawyers he helped mentor, train, and inspire to build careers in public interest work, as well as the millions of clients who have received legal assistance from Legal Services in New Jersey over the decades; the countless others who have benefitted from pro se materials, videos, and other publications; and the low-income communities who have benefitted from his dogged commitment to raising awareness of the prevalence and consequences of poverty in our state.

Miller published a number of reports and articles on poverty, many through the LSNJ Poverty Research Institute (PRI), which he created in 1997. PRI reports over these four decades include the Poverty Benchmarks Series (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012); The Real Cost Of Living Series (2008 and 2013); and eight reports between 2002 and 2013 about legal needs and the legal aid gap.

He was widely respected among the New Jersey Supreme Court Justices from former Chief Justice Robert Wilentz in the 1970s and 80s to current Chief Justice Stuart J. Rabner, who said, “He made a meaningful difference in countless lives, not only the clients he served, but also the attorneys he inspired.”

De Miller made a “huge contribution to the second civil rights movement,” says retired New Jersey Supreme Court Justice James H. Coleman, Jr., through his efforts to create “more racial, gender and ethnic diversity, justice, and political success. Those victories have helped to transform America, from being two nations to becoming more closely one nation by the time of De’s death.”

De Miller died at the age of 76 in his Tewksbury, New Jersey home on March 1, 2021. In reflections offered at that time, former LSNJ Board Chair and retired Chief Justice Deborah T. Poritz spoke of their regular visits to Trenton to make the case for increased Legal Services funding. “He had an encyclopedic memory, always putting together the best case. Always shaping that case by his concern and his compassion for Legal Services clients. ... He was eloquent when he chose to be and funny when he chose to be.” When testifying before the budget committee in front of both the houses, she recalls, “He spoke with the passion and knowledge that was the hallmark of the man that we all admire and love.”



New Jersey Legal Services Years of Service

All Legal Services staff who have served five years or more are listed below, in successive five year cohorts. We honor and congratulate them on this 55th anniversary commemoration!

*indicates those who have reached a threshold year of service



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Shafiqa Bekker
Pamela Bell
Christopher Benson
Ashley Camporeale
Adelynn Carde
T. Rinu Cherian
Jennifer Chinchilla
Vincent Cimilluca
Yahaira Cordero
Carla Davila
Joann Diaz
Justine Digeronimo
Jennifer Donnelly
Lisa Douglas
Scott Dranoff
Patrick Dunican
Olatokunbo Emmanuel
Mervin Evertz
Tahlia Feliciano
Marissa Fisher
Valerio Gonzalez
Nicholas Graham
Leila Halwani
Tanisha Hansford-Colon
LaTanya R. Harry

Eileen Hernandez
Erica Hernandez DeLuna*
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Melissa Kiefer
Kevin Kieffer
Kimberly Koopman
Thomas Lamaina
Yvonne Larsen*
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Nancy Limo
Gina LoBue*
Judy Long
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Ruth Kotsalos
Natasha McLaurin
Graham Mowday
Elliston Panton
Anisa Rahim
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Elsa Alvarado
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Maria Castruita
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Ashley M. Courtney
Victor Dave*
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Monica Gural
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John N. Ukegbu
Susan R. Wiesen*
Angelika O. Williams
Denise Williams



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Willie Norman
Wendy Bryant Robinson



In Memoriam

This 55th anniversary night, we honor and remember with love those with whom we have made common cause for a substantial period, but who have since followed a different path. The list, inevitably partial because of the limitations of records and memories, includes staff colleagues, board members, and some key supporters who have passed since the 50th anniversary. Since the unity of our mission seeking justice outweighs lesser distinctions in precise role or years of service, we present them without such differentiations. They are grouped by the last program with which they were associated.

Central Jersey Legal Services

George Conover
Naomi Conover
Luisa Gonzalez
Jermaine Jackson

Essex Newark Legal Services

Lynne Gale
Frank Hutchins
Brenda Ayah Ravenell
The Reverend Willie Simmons
Yvonne Taylor
Theresa Waters

Legal Services of New Jersey

Donna Hildreth
Allan Lichtenstein
Melville "De" Miller, Jr.

Legal Services of Northwest Jersey

Allan Iskra

Northeast New Jersey Legal Services

Yaenis Hernandez

South Jersey Legal Services

Brenda Salazar
Jennifer Salome
Abbey Tanu

THE NEW JERSEY LEGAL SERVICES SYSTEM

STATEWIDE COORDINATING PROGRAM

Legal Services of New Jersey

REGIONAL LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAMS

Central Jersey Legal Services

Covering Mercer, Middlesex, and Union counties

Essex-Newark Legal Services

Covering Essex county

Legal Services of Northwest Jersey

Covering Hunterdon, Morris, Somerset, Sussex, and Warren counties

Northeast New Jersey Legal Services

Covering Bergen, Hudson, and Passaic counties

South Jersey Legal Services

*Covering Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland,
Gloucester, Ocean, Monmouth, and Salem counties*

