

## NEWS RELEASE

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### FOR RELEASE AT WILL

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## TWO LEGAL LUMINARIES AND RENOWNED LAWMAKER HEADLINE LEGAL SERVICES' 2017 MAJOR AWARDS EVENT

EDISON — Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ) in June will bestow its highest recognition, induction into the Equal Justice Circle of Honor, upon two of New Jersey's most prominent attorneys — former Supreme Court Chief Justice Deborah T. Poritz and Merck Chairman and CEO Kenneth C. Frazier.

The same honor also is being awarded posthumously to the late state Sen. Wynona M. Lipman, a trailblazer for social and economic justice during her quarter century in New Jersey's upper house.

Said LSNJ President Melville D. Miller, Jr., "Through their work these recipients each have contributed enormously to securing greater justice and a more civil society, with special concern for those living in poverty." He added, "Most significantly, they not only spoke of their commitment but clearly lived it."

The awards and others will be presented at a reception June 7, beginning at 6 p.m., at the Grounds For Sculpture in Hamilton Township.

Several law firms, a public policy fund and corporations are sponsoring the event, which also will include medals to attorneys in many of the state's 21 counties who provided "extraordinary" hours of pro bono legal service to poor people.

Additionally, special awards will be given to Rafael V. Aviles, director of the state Office of Legal Services in the Treasury Department; Ellen Ferrise, the retiring executive director of the IOLTA Fund; and attorney Michael Torpey, president and managing partner of A.F.T.

Associates, for their contributions to Legal Services and to the expansion of free civil legal assistance to those in poverty. Heading the list of sponsors are Merck and Lowenstein Sandler. Others include The Fund for New Jersey, Porzio Bromberg & Newman, Drinker Biddle, John L. McGoldrick, LeClairRyan, Brach Eichler, Cullen and Dykman, PSE&G and McCreedy & Cox.

Poritz, the first woman to serve as the state's attorney general and later chief justice of the high court, was instrumental in many of the major decisions affecting the Garden State's legal and social fabric. That includes improving the juvenile justice system, unification of the courts, defense of Megan's Law, expansion of drug courts, and leading the advancement of more female judges into top judiciary management positions that largely had been the domain of male judges. She was involved in high profile decisions on school funding, affordable housing, the rights of a gay person to be in the Boy Scouts, death penalty fairness, and equal rights for same sex couples, among others. Her efforts as chief justice to support civil legal assistance to those who cannot afford an attorney have continued in her role as chair of the board of LSNJ. After her retirement from the New Jersey Supreme Court she also continued to seek equal justice through her work with many other institutions, notably including the Fund for New Jersey.

Kenneth C. Frazier, one of the recognized giants in today's pharmaceutical world, joined Merck in 1992. After advancing through a number of senior management posts that, in part, included a focus on diversity issues, he was elevated to chairman of the board and CEO in 2011, becoming the first African-American to lead a major pharmaceutical.

Under his leadership at Merck, there have been major ongoing efforts to develop new drugs to deal with Alzheimer's and other scourges, and also provide drugs to needy people in Third World nations. He is known for insisting that such research and development be given priority even when expensive R and D costs cut somewhat into the bottom line. He has explained his goal of marrying business interests with social responsibility: "As a leader in global healthcare we are committed to addressing critical social, environmental and economic challenges to ensure not only the vitality of our business, but also the health of the world."

A former member of the LSNJ board, Frazier has long urged lawyers to provide *pro bono* services for the needy. He spearheaded Merck's exemplary *pro bono public* legal assistance efforts, setting a high bar and national model for corporations that would seek to advance equal justice for all and assist the disadvantaged. As head of Merck, Frazier has chaired and participated in major national efforts to protect and expand legal services for the poor. This

award also recognizes his personal efforts in *pro bono* death penalty defense work, perhaps the most challenging of all criminal law representation, during his earlier tenure at the law firm of Drinker Biddle, where he worked to help free an innocent man who had spent two decades on death row in an Alabama prison.

In 1971 Wynona M. Lipman squeaked out a narrow victory to become the first African-American woman to serve in the New Jersey State Senate. A Fulbright scholar, in the ensuing 27 years in Trenton she emerged as a stalwart for the rights of individuals, the poor, minorities, children, women, families and small business operators. In winning her next eight elections to the upper house, she never garnered less than 83 percent of the vote. Her commitment to equality and social justice made her the voice of the voiceless as she focused her efforts on helping those “with the least access to the political system.” She strongly advocated that citizens get into politics, asserting, “If you want to create change, don’t just get to know important people, become important people.”

Lipman’s pioneering and courageous legislative career constitutes a trail of major achievements: New Jersey’s Prevention of Domestic Violence Act – only the second such statute in the nation; the Fair Housing Act; critical protection for children; unstinting support for the expansion of civil legal assistance for the poor; the list simply goes on. She would press still harder on protection from abuse, so that eventually such safeguards not only dealt with spouses and couples, but also would provide needed protections for the elderly and disabled in abusive situations. A year before her death in 1999 she was inducted into New Jersey’s Woman’s Hall of Fame. Her own words epitomized what drove her: “If you really want to stand out from the crowd and be recognized by society, then it is the quality of contributions which you make to others that counts.”

*Legal Services of New Jersey heads the state’s Legal Services system, a network of five independent non-profit corporations. Legal Services has just completed 50 years of free essential legal aid in civil matters to low-income people through its offices in all 21 counties. Since its inception, Legal Services has provided representation in more than 2.4 million cases.*

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