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FOR RELEASE AT WILL

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LATEST LEGAL SERVICES NEWSLETTER FOCUSES ON EXPUNGEMENT REFORMS, FEDERAL INCOME TAX RETURNS

EDISON — The latest newsletter from Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ) provides details on recently-enacted expungement law reforms, as well as advice on filing this year's IRS income tax returns.

The bilingual publication, "Looking Out For Your Legal Rights," is accessible online at www.lsnjlaw.org and is available at all New Jersey Legal Services offices.

The new expungement law makes it easier and faster for individuals, under various Conditions, to have their arrest and conviction records expunged. Notably, most marijuana-related crimes will be downgraded to disorderly persons offenses and qualify for expungement.

In municipal court cases that do not lead to convictions, the record may be expunged immediately by the court. Most of the reforms will take effect this June 15. More information, under the heading of "Clearing Your Record Online," is available at www.lsnjlaw.org.

Regarding this year's taxes, the publication advises that people with incomes under \$56,000 may avoid going to paid tax preparers because they can get help free from two sources: Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) or Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) by calling 1-800-906-9887 or going to www.irs.gov/individuals/free-tax-return-preparation-for-you-by-volunteers.

The newsletter further notes people anticipating refunds should steer away from private preparation firms that offer instant cash in advance of the refunds — actual loans from which fees and interest are deducted. The qualifications of private preparers should be checked beforehand.

The publication explains the meaning of such terms as filing status, standard deductions or itemized deductions, tax credits and other key aspects of income tax returns. It notes even individuals who do not need to file returns, especially those with low incomes, should consider filing anyway because they may be owed refunds or may be eligible for various credits.

Additionally, six-month filing extensions are available if sought before the April 15 filing deadline.

Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ), located in Edison, heads the state's Legal Services system, a network of five independent non-profit corporations and has been providing free essential legal aid in civil matters to low-income people through offices in all 21 counties for more than 50 years. Since its inception, LSNJ has provided representation in more than 2.4 million cases.

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