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LEGAL SERVICES OF NEW JERSEY NEWSLETTER FOCUSES ON EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE SERVICES AND EXPUNGEMENT REFORMS

EDISON — The latest newsletter of Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ) centers on the state’s Emergency Assistance program for the homeless and new reforms in the expungement process.

The bilingual publication, “Looking Out For Your Legal Rights,” may be viewed online at www.lsnjlaw.org.

The newsletter explains how Emergency Assistance is a virtual lifeline for poor New Jerseyans who are homeless or on the verge of becoming homeless. For those who meet eligibility requirements, the program can assist with rental arrears, utility payments, shelter placement and other costs. That includes, for example, providing ongoing payment for part of rent for a period generally limited to 12 months of an adult recipient’s lifetime.

Just this past December, though, a new law took effect making more families and individuals eligible for extension of the time limits. Details on how to apply, as well as how to challenge adverse rulings, are contained in the newsletter article. Requests should be made by

calling the “Fair Hearing Hotline at 1-800-792-9773. Help also is available on line from the LSNJLAW Hotline at www.lsnjlawhotline.org or by calling 1-888-LSNJ-LAW (1-888-576-5529).

Meanwhile, in January, significant changes in expungement procedures became effective, essentially and effectively giving more people seeking expungement of prior offenses better chances of gaining employment, education, and housing opportunities without their past hindering their chances.

One change making the process more accessible allows applicants to file requests in their home county or any county where one or more of the convictions occurred. Further, certain applicants can now seek “financial need” exceptions from the 10-year waiting period they previously faced.

It also has been made clear that a person with a non-expungable conviction may be eligible to expunge other convictions, including municipal ordinance offenses, rather than wait for all of them to be considered together.

The current newsletter also offers much information about the rights of renters, as well as detailing the functions and differing responsibilities of licensed referral agents and real estate brokers in finding places to rent.

Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ), located in Edison, heads the state’s Legal Services system, a network of six independent nonprofit corporations that provides free essential legal aid in civil matters to low-income people in all 21 counties.

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