

Legal Services of New Jersey

2023 EQUAL JUSTICE AWARDS RECEPTION

*Celebrating Those Who Advance
Justice and Fairness Under the Law*



THE PALACE AT SOMERSET PARK

Somerset, NJ

Tuesday, October 10, 2023

The New Jersey Legal Services System

Statewide Program

Legal Services of New Jersey

Offices in Edison, Newark, and Collingswood
Coordinating and supporting the statewide network and
providing statewide legal representation and advocacy
through more than 20 specialized projects

Regional Programs

Central Jersey Legal Services

Offices in Mercer, Middlesex, and Union Counties

Essex-Newark Legal Services

Office in Essex County

Legal Services of Northwest Jersey

Offices in Hunterdon, Morris, Somerset, Sussex,
and Warren Counties

Northeast New Jersey Legal Services

Offices in Bergen, Hudson, and Passaic Counties

South Jersey Legal Services

Offices in Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May,
Cumberland/Salem, Gloucester, Monmouth, and Ocean Counties

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President's Message

Good Evening and Welcome!

Thank you very much for joining us this evening. I am delighted to welcome you to Legal Services of New Jersey's 2023 Equal Justice Awards Reception.

Year after year, this event serves as a powerful reminder that the quest for justice for all New Jerseyans is a collective, mutual, and ongoing effort. All of society has a stake in ensuring access to justice and the availability of legal representation, regardless of one's ability to pay, and all have something to contribute. We are grateful to everyone who has joined our mission over the past 56 years—whether newly, once more, or year after year.

Tonight, we are proud—and pleased—to recognize the impact and contributions of law firms, legislators, advocates, medical providers, volunteer attorneys, and community organizations and members across the state in the ongoing effort to ensure greater justice for all. During this evening's program, we:

- Highlight and honor the contributions of pro bono volunteers at Legal Services of New Jersey and our five regional programs, whose assistance has proved particularly impactful during this post-pandemic period, during which we have seen a tremendous increase in need for civil legal assistance;
- Recognize valuable and noteworthy contributions to the mission of advancing justice for low-income New Jerseyans, via the presentation of special awards to two state legislators, Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson and Senator Brian P. Stack;
- Celebrate the 15th anniversary of New Jersey's first medical-legal partnership, the Legal Assistance to Medical Patients (LAMP) project, with a video tribute and presentations to RWJBarnabas Health and David Mebane, Esq., Executive Vice President and General Counsel and the many individuals, organizations, and funders who have championed this pioneering program; and
- Continue to document and memorialize those extraordinary individuals who have helped bend the arc of progress toward justice in New Jersey, with the induction of The Honorable Joseph H. Rodriguez and Michael R. Cole (posthumously) into the New Jersey Equal Justice Library and Archive (NJEJLA) Circle of Honor.

I extend my sincerest gratitude to everyone honored this evening. Thank you for the time, effort, energy, and compassion you have invested in Legal Services' clients and mission.

We invite everyone to join us for the next installation of the Melville "De" Miller, Jr. Justice Series on Wednesday, December 13; to stay engaged as a continuing—or first-time—volunteer; or to participate in our annual Campaign for Justice. Thank you all, again, for joining us this evening, and we hope to see you soon!

Dawn K. Miller, Esq.
President
Legal Services of New Jersey
October 10, 2023

Order of Proceedings

5:30 Cocktails and Buffet

7:00 Awards Program

Opening Remarks

Presentation of Equal Justice Medals

Major Contributors

All of the major contributors are listed in the program. Each in attendance tonight received at registration an embossed attestation of their 2023 Equal Justice Medal as a major contributor. We will ask the contributors from each program to stand and be recognized.

Exceptional Contributors

The work of these exceptional contributors is described in the program. Each will be called to the stage to receive their award.

Significant Contributors

The work of these exceptional contributors is described in the program. Each will be called to the stage to receive their award.

Presentation of Special Awards

The Lipman-Franks Award

Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson

Legislative District #15

New Jersey Senator Brian P. Stack

Legislative District #33

Order of Proceedings

Legal Assistance to Medical Patients (LAMP) 15 Year Anniversary

The William J. Brennan, Jr. Citation for Justice

RWJBarnabas Health

Longtime partner of LSNJ's LAMP Project

David A. Mebane, Esq.

Executive Vice President and General Counsel, RWJBarnabas Health

Presentation of Inductees into the New Jersey Equal Justice Library and Archive Circle of Honor

*With special guest The Honorable Thomas H. Kean
48th Governor of New Jersey*

The Honorable Joseph H. Rodriguez

*United States District Judge for the District of New Jersey
Former New Jersey Public Advocate*

Michael R. Cole, Esq.

(posthumously)

*Former Chair, LSNJ Board of Trustees
Chief Counsel to Governor Thomas H. Kean
Partner, DeCotiis, Fitzpatrick and Cole Law Firm*

Closing Thoughts

Dawn K. Miller, Esq.

President, LSNJ



About the Awards

New Jersey Equal Justice Library and Archive Circle of Honor

For more than 56 years, Legal Services in New Jersey has been a central force in the struggle for civil legal justice in this state. With the creation of the New Jersey Equal Justice Library and Archive (NJEJLA), we have embarked on a mission to preserve key materials relating to the quest for equality in New Jersey, to serve as a resource for educators and all residents, with collections in both digital and physical formats.

A major component of the NJEJLA is the Circle of Honor, heralding those who have made extraordinary achievements in advancing equal justice, and whose efforts and lives stand as enduring paradigms for others to emulate. The Circle of Honor furthers the NJEJLA's historical, educational, and preservation goals, as well as a fourth key purpose—inspiration.

Tonight's honorees will be Circle of Honor inductees The Honorable Joseph H. Rodriguez and Michael R. Cole (posthumously). They join The Honorable James H. Coleman, Jr., former justice, Supreme Court of New Jersey; Robert Del Tufo, former attorney general of New Jersey; Douglas S. Eakeley, former chair of the LSNJ Board of Trustees and former chair of the Board of Directors; Kenneth C. Frazier, former president and CEO of Merck and Co., Inc. and current executive chair of Merck's board of directors; The Honorable Thomas H. Kean, 48th governor of New Jersey; Wynona M. Lipman, New Jersey's first Black female state senator; Melville "De" Miller, Jr., co-founder and former president; The Honorable Deborah T. Poritz, former chief justice, Supreme Court of New Jersey; Stanley C. Van Ness, the first Public Advocate in New Jersey; Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman; Loretta Weinberg, former New Jersey Senate majority leader; and The Honorable Robert N. Wilentz, former chief justice, Supreme Court of New Jersey.



About the Awards

The Equal Justice Named Awards

Several named awards are given in recognition of outstanding achievements in advancing equal justice. The descriptions of the awards presented this year are given below.

The Lipman-Franks Award is named for two esteemed state legislators, Wynona Lipman and Robert Franks, who, acting in a bipartisan fashion, played especially central roles in developing early financial support for Legal Services and in securing greater and more equal justice for the disadvantaged.

The William J. Brennan, Jr. Citation for Justice is reserved for those who have demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to furthering the mission and work of the state's Legal Services programs, and can include prior award recipients who have continued to make significant contributions to the cause of equal justice that compel further recognition.

Equal Justice Medals

Equal Justice Medals were first awarded in 1983. They recognize and celebrate the pro bono efforts of individuals, law firms, and organizations that have made important contributions to securing greater justice for disadvantaged people, especially through legal processes and the judicial system.

Major Contributors

This evening, we recognize individuals, law firms, and organizations that have made major contributions to Legal Services' pro bono programs throughout the state from February 2022 to August 2023. Major contribution for individuals is defined as 40 hours providing full representation on one or more pro bono cases; for firms, 100 hours collectively. A special designation is given for in-house volunteers to recognize those individuals who have spent more than 100 hours providing legal assistance to clients on a pro bono, uncompensated basis in a Legal Services office.

Central Jersey Legal Services

Scott P. Borsack, Esq.
Nikki J. Davis, Esq.
Carlo J. Dehart, Esq.
Stanley Fink, Esq.

John E. Hogan, Esq.
Rachel A. Mynhier, Esq.
Michelle Roman, Esq.

Nicole Shim, Esq.
Steven J. Sico, Esq.
Carol Stanton Meier, Esq.

Essex-Newark Legal Services

Thodore Bohn, Esq.

McCarter & English, LLP

Legal Services of New Jersey

Carl G. Archer, Esq.
Peter J. Broege, Esq.
Edward G. Hanratty, Esq.
Marylizette Jimenez, Esq.
Lee M. Perlman, Esq.
William S. Singer, Esq.
Victor G. Sison, Esq.
Pauline M. Young, Esq.

Jarred Reiling, Esq.
Marc Aaron Silverman, Esq.
Lana Turpie, Esq.

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Alysia Finnegan, Esq.
Lisa Ann Jakob, Esq.
Matthew Allan Leff, Esq.
Eric A. Mead, Esq.
John David Reilly, Esq.
John Todaro, Esq.

Verizon

Karen M. Francis, Esq.
Sudha Kantor, Esq.
Jerome Austin Karnick, Esq.
Ade Oremosu, Esq.
Anita Patankar-Stoll, Esq.
Susan Vinci, Esq.
Nicholas Vogt, Esq.

DLA Piper LLP (US)

Christopher Gismondi, Esq.
Aaron Kirchner-Loeser, Esq.
Kira Mineroff, Esq.

Major Contributors

Legal Services of Northwest Jersey

Mary Ellen Koscs-Fleming,
Esq.

Diane S. Margolin, Esq.

Northeast New Jersey Legal Services

Donald T. Bonomo, Esq.
Lazaro Carvajal, Esq.
Jeffrey D. Coots, Esq.
Karl A. Kazmierczak, Esq.
Yongmoon Kim, Esq.

Carlos D. Martinez, Esq.
Joshua E. Maze, Esq.
William McInerney, Esq.
Jamal Romero, Esq.

Cheryl Schechter, Esq.
John J. Scura III, Esq.
David L. Stevens, Esq.
Fumiko Takada, Esq.

South Jersey Legal Services

Joseph Albanese, Esq.
Andrew T. Archer, Esq.
Carrie J. Boyle, Esq.
Jill T. Bryan, Esq.
Susan R. Dargay, Esq.
David Esposito, Esq.
John W. Hargrave, Esq.
John G. Holl, Esq.
David Huang, Esq.
Danielle M. Hughes, Esq.
Anthony Landolfi, Esq.

Ellen McDowell, Esq.
Ronald E. Norman, Esq.
Katherine O'Brien, Esq.
Thomas J. Orr, Esq.
Lee M. Perlman, Esq.
Paul Pflumm, Esq.
Daniel L. Reinganum, Esq.
Rex Roldan, Esq.
Laurie Ruben, Esq.
Mary Beth Schroeder, Esq.

Chad M. Sherwood, Esq.
Steven A. Silnutzer, Esq.
Barbara J. Snavelly, Esq.
David A. Snyder, Esq.
Joel Spivack, Esq.
Daniel E. Straffi, Esq.
Brian S. Thomas, Esq.
Jill M. Tribulas, Esq.
Rachelle Ann Waitz, Esq.
Tamika Wyche, Esq.

Exceptional Contributors

The Exceptional Service category of Equal Justice Medals is for those individuals who have, in one year or over a number of years, made extraordinary pro bono contributions to their affiliate programs, with one awardee honored from each New Jersey Legal Services program.

Central Jersey Legal Services

Steven J. Sico, Esq.

Steven J. Sico is an attorney in Woodbridge with an LLM in Litigation Management who handles family law, personal injury, real estate transactions, and bankruptcy. He started volunteering for Central Jersey Legal Services, Inc. within 4 years of becoming an attorney. In 2022, he took a complicated divorce case on behalf of a domestic violence survivor where all issues were contested, winning big for his client. He was able to get her out of poverty with the results of the divorce. As a result, she and her children will be able to live safely and securely. He spent 75 hours on this one case.

In his client's words, "Mr. Sico is an exceptional lawyer. He is brilliant, professional, and assertive. Going through divorce it's not an easygoing process and he was very helpful, full of patience always willing to listen and answer questions. Mr. Sico is honestly someone who truly cares. He is very attentive caring and supportive. I'm very grateful [sic] and appreciate him for all he did for my kids and I."

Essex-Newark Legal Services

McCarter & English, LLP

Michelle Pallak, Esq., partner and pro bono director

The relationship between New Jersey's largest law firm, McCarter & English, and Essex-Newark Legal Services (ENLS) has been a strong one for more than three decades. It has included service by firm attorneys on ENLS' board, including a five-year stint as board president by then McCarter partner Harvey C. Kaish.

In 1998, on the occasion of ENLS' purchase of its present office in downtown Newark, McCarter partner Steven Hoskins handled the closing pro bono.

In 2018, the firm joined with the city of Newark and ENLS around the creation of a right to counsel initiative for low-income Newark residents facing eviction. For its part, the firm established a fellowship program to be staffed by a full time McCarter attorney to deliver free legal assistance to low-income Newark tenants facing eviction.

Exceptional Contributors

As part of that initiative, the city of Newark created the Office of Tenant Legal Services (OTLS), hired attorney staff, and entered into a contract with ENLS to work together to provide free legal assistance to low-income city residents facing eviction. Beyond the efforts of its housing fellow, numerous other members of the firm have accepted tenancy cases and other matters on referral from ENLS.

Earlier this year, the firm weighed in on the critical issue of housing habitability, filing before New Jersey's Appellate Division an amicus curiae brief on behalf of the New Jersey Tenants Organization. Also, this year, ENLS and McCarter & English began a partnership toward making legal assistance available to low-income persons seeking a name change.

In sum, ENLS has come to rely on the firm of McCarter & English as a partner in helping address critical legal needs, including matters where the firm's experience and power can make a difference.

Legal Services of New Jersey

Carl Archer, Esq.

Legal Services of New Jersey is honored to recognize Carl Archer and his outstanding legal team for their extraordinary contributions to our pro bono program and their remarkable service provided on behalf of Legal Services clients.

Carl Archer's firm, Archer Law Office, has five New Jersey offices and specializes in elder law and estate planning, focusing on the legal needs of seniors, those with disabilities, veterans, and their caregivers.

Carl agreed to take referrals from LSNJ for clients who had recently received long-awaited settlement awards from the Department of Justice class action lawsuit, specifically those who needed assistance setting up special needs trusts. Carl advised and represented each and every client who needed assistance. We would not be able to provide pro bono assistance to our clients without the help of people like Carl Archer, and his dedicated staff.

Legal Services of Northwest New Jersey

Mary Ellen Koscs-Fleming, Esq.

Legal Services of Northwest Jersey (LSNWJ) is pleased to honor Mary Ellen Koscs-Fleming with the Exceptional Contributor Award. Mary Ellen has volunteered for LSNWJ and its predecessor organization since 1996, and she has served as an LSNWJ Trustee since 2008. Mary Ellen is currently the president of the LSNWJ Board of Trustees, and she is the Board's



Exceptional Contributors

Pro Bono Champion to LSNWJ. Mary Ellen started volunteering for Somerset-Sussex Legal Services in 1996 when, as an attorney for Merck, she was part of the Merck legal department's pro bono program. Over 27 years, Mary Ellen has handled numerous landlord-tenant cases while donating hundreds of volunteer hours. As LSNWJ's pro bono champion, Mary Ellen was instrumental in sustaining our pro bono programs during COVID-19. Mary Ellen identified new partnerships, maintained existing relationships, and chaired committee meetings during this period. Her efforts helped LSNWJ develop the necessary tools and establish policies and procedures to maintain our pro bono program in a changed environment after COVID-19. LSNWJ owes the success of its current pro bono program to Mary Ellen Koscs-Fleming.

Northeast New Jersey Legal Services

William McInerney, Esq.

William McInerney is an in-house volunteer with NNJLS. Bill started volunteering in September 2022 and spends two days a week in the Bergen County office assisting clients in a variety of legal areas, including housing, benefits, domestic violence, and more recently, criminal expungements. Over the past year, Bill has worked on more than 22 cases. Despite staffing changes in the Pro Bono unit, Bill remained committed to volunteering and, in May 2023, asked to take on cases that are more difficult and full representation cases in new areas of law. Bill is always ready to help on a case, by providing advice or finding answers to client's questions. His decision to start taking more full representation cases in a variety of legal areas confirms his commitment to the work and mission of NNJLS. We are very grateful for the time Bill has given to NNJLS, and our clients are lucky to have him as part of our team!

South Jersey Legal Services

Barbara J. Snavelly, Esq.

Barbara Snavelly of the Law Office of Rogers & Snavelly has been a volunteer for the South Jersey Legal Services, Inc. (SJLS) Private Attorney Involvement Program (PAI) for many years and has contributed to the program in many ways.

Barbara has been a great supporter of The Honorable Judith H. Wizmur Bankruptcy Pro Bono Project at Rutgers Law School in Camden. Through this project, volunteer attorneys assist low-income individuals in South Jersey in need of Chapter 7 bankruptcy relief. Barbara has not only assisted many clients through this project, but she has also acted as a mentor to law students, which has been important for the long-term success of this project. Barbara is patient and kind to the students and clients.



Exceptional Contributors

Barbara also is a valued member of the SJLS PAI South Jersey Bankruptcy Practitioners' Group. Through this group, bankruptcy attorneys receive free New Jersey CLE credits in exchange for the commitment to accept three pro bono Chapter 7 bankruptcy cases. Barbara recently completed a two-year term as a member of the Steering Committee for the SJBPG. The Steering Committee develops the curriculum for each seasonal year, and its members serve as or obtain the speakers for each of the Continuing Legal Education presentations offered over the course of the year. As a Steering Committee member, Barbara helped to develop the agenda and list of topics for the 2022-2023 seasonal year. Barbara served as one of the main presenters for the opening "6 Topics for 60 Minutes" session during which she presented information as part of a "Landlord/Tenant Court and Chapter 13 Update." During the second half of the year, Barbara also volunteered to serve as the lead presenter for a presentation on "Municipality Vacant Property Fees." Both presentations were very well received and appreciated by the members. Having knowledgeable and enthusiastic presenters is essential to this group and it encourages others to join and, in turn, volunteer to help individuals in our community who are overwhelmed by debt. In addition to serving as a presenter and program facilitator, Barbara accepted more than double the average number of cases taken by members of the SJBPG.

Barbara has assisted many low-income individuals over the years with Chapter 7 bankruptcy relief. Barbara is a kind, knowledgeable and enthusiastic volunteer. SJLS especially is appreciative of Barbara's efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic when she not only kept volunteering but also increased her volunteer efforts.

The success of our Bankruptcy Project is due to the dedication of many attorneys in South Jersey as best exemplified by volunteers like Barbara.

Significant Contributors

Equal Justice Medals are awarded to recognize and honor those firms, community organizations, board members, and individuals that made significant contributions to Legal Services and provided much need services to the low-income community over time.

Central Jersey Legal Services

Rebecca A. Brazzano, Esq., and Valerie J. Camara, Esq.

Valerie and Rebecca have been accepting guardianship referrals from Central Jersey Legal Services, Inc. as a team. They are always willing to accept a case and usually have at least one in process at any one time. Val has been a member of our board at Central Jersey Legal Services, Inc. for many years and has served as board chair for the last 4 years. Valerie started accepting guardianship referrals from our office about 10 years ago when she worked at Merck, partnering at that time with a co-worker Gloria Fuentes. After Valerie retired from Merck, she recruited Rebecca Brazzano of Thompson Hine, LLP in 2017 to partner with her. Rebecca left Thompson Hine last year and continues to work with Valerie as a guardianship team, accepting cases from CJS.

Legal Services of Northwest Jersey

Kimberly Cowart

Legal Services of Northwest Jersey (LSNWI) is honored to recommend Kimberly Cowart for the Significant Contributor Award. Kim is the Director of the Somerset County Community Development Office and has been with the County for over 20 years. After Hurricane Ida struck New Jersey, seriously impacting the Manville area, Kim was instrumental in leading relief efforts for the residents throughout Somerset County. Kim spearheaded at least five multi-agency resource center events throughout Somerset County that provided community residents with food, blankets, and critical services. We frequently work with Kim when a community resident is seeking assistance, whether it is a person affected by domestic violence or at risk of losing their housing. Kim has been a staunch supporter of Legal Services and has supported our work with tenants experiencing evictions for over 20 years.



Lipman-Franks Award

Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson

Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson graduated from Trenton State College/The College of New Jersey with a bachelor's degree in sociology and from Central Michigan University with a Master of Science in administration. Her public service career began as a member of the Trenton City Council (2010-2018) and Council Vice-President (2014-2018). She served on the Trenton City Council for seven and a half years before being elected to the New Jersey Assembly. She was sworn into office in February 2018 and has since served as the Assemblywoman for the New Jersey 15th Legislative District.

During the 2022-2023 Legislative Season, she participated in the following committees: the Joint Committee on the Public Schools (co-chair), Commerce and Economic Development (vice-chair), Budget, Higher Education, and the Joint Committee on Economic Justice and Equal Employment.

Reynolds-Jackson is also a commissioner on New Jersey's Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Commission, which holds an annual celebration of his work and legacy, coordinates other programming and scholarships, and generally aims to raise public awareness of King's ideals and philosophy. She is vice chair of the New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus.

During her tenure in the Legislature, she has focused on social justice, enforcing business and landlord responsibility, expungement, voting rights, environmental protection, demanding accountability for students, and collaborating with the police on crime prevention. She has worked to improve access to healthcare, education, and affordable housing and is a champion for women and minority-owned businesses. Reynolds Jackson's support of Legal Services—most recently as a panelist in the 2022 Miller Justice Series Webinar on Environmental Justice—has helped New Jersey's most vulnerable access the critical services needed for advancing equal justice.

New Jersey's Legal Services programs appear annually before the Senate Budget Committee to discuss statewide efforts and funding. Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ) meets each year with Reynolds-Jackson, who is very familiar with the critical services the program provides to the community. She has actively engaged with LSNJ to ensure that legal education materials reach her community. She is a true champion of social justice.



Lipman-Franks Award

New Jersey Senator Brian P. Stack

Senator Brian P. Stack represents the 33rd Legislative District since 2007. He currently serves as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee. He has also served as the mayor of Union City, New Jersey, since 2000. He previously was elected to the Assembly in 2003 and served two terms.

Stack was born in Jersey City, where he became involved in local civic issues as a teenager. He graduated from Union City's Emerson High School and has been a tireless tenant advocate since 1985. In the Legislature, Stack has sponsored measures to bolster tenants' rights, public safety, and the state's economy, most recently taking tremendous measures to protect tenants against eviction as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As mayor, Stack has focused on quality of life issues in Union City. Results of his efforts can be seen in the cleaner streets, new schools, parks, buildings, festivals, and recreational activities for seniors. He prides himself on being a true public servant whose mission is to help the residents of his community.

New Jersey's Legal Services programs appear annually before the Senate Budget Committee to discuss statewide efforts and funding. Stack is a steadfast and committed supporter of the mission and work of Legal Services to provide equal justice to low-income New Jersey residents. He has consistently stressed, during the budget hearings, his respect for the quality and seriousness of Legal Services advocates, as well as the effectiveness of the program and the tremendous impact that Legal Services has on its clients. As an effective legislator and politician, Stack backs up his kind words with political action each year by sponsoring a budget resolution to support the work of Legal Services. Legal Services could not ask for a more consistent, effective, and compassionate leader in the New Jersey Senate.

The William J. Brennan, Jr. Citation for Justice Award

RWJBarnabas Health

Created through the 2016 merger of the Robert Wood Johnson Health System and the Saint Barnabas Health Care System, RWJBarnabas Health (RWJBH) is the state's largest health care delivery system, providing treatment and care to more than three million patients annually. The health system includes 12 acute care hospitals; three acute care children's hospitals; Children's Specialized Hospital, with a network of outpatient pediatric rehabilitation centers; a free-standing, 100-bed behavioral health center; two trauma centers; a satellite emergency department; ambulatory care centers; geriatric centers; the state's largest behavioral health network; and comprehensive home care and hospice programs.

RWJBH is also New Jersey's largest private employer, with more than 38,000 employees and 9,000 physicians. In partnership with Rutgers University, RWJBH has created New Jersey's largest academic health care system, training and educating more than 1,000 medical residents and interns annually. The collaboration aligns RWJBH with Rutgers' education, research, and clinical activities, including those at the Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey—the state's only NCI-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center—and Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care. In providing high-quality, patient-centered care, the hospital system is committed to the ongoing improvement of the health, quality of life, and vitality of the communities it serves.

From the RWJBH website:

"We strive to bring the best healthcare to meet the evolving needs of residents in New Jersey — whether that be enhancing the coordination for treating complex health conditions or improving community health through local programs and education."

The William J. Brennan, Jr. Citation for Justice Award

David A. Mebane, Esq.

David A. Mebane, Esq., attended Princeton University as an undergraduate and earned his J.D. from Boston University School of Law. After graduation, he clerked for the Honorable Herman Michels in the NJ Superior Court, Appellate Division, and worked at Lowenstein Sandler and Brach Eichler before joining the RWJBarnabas Health (RWJBH) system.

During his nearly 30 years with RWJBH, Mebane has been instrumental in many of its crucial moments. Before the Community Kimball Health Care System joined the Saint Barnabas Health Care System, Mebane was a founding member of its legal system. In 2016, he was involved in the merger of Robert Wood Johnson Health System and Barnabas Health to create RWJBH, which contributed to his being honored as General Counsel of the Year in Healthcare by NJBIZ in 2017.

Mebane has served many roles at RWJBH, including senior vice president for legal affairs (1996-2014) and general counsel (2014-2016). He is currently executive vice president and general counsel, roles he has held since 2019. Mebane provides advice on RWJBH's transactions, litigation and contracts, risk financing, compliance, and day-to-day operations and advocacy.

Mebane has provided critical support for LSNJ's Legal Assistance to Medical Patients (LAMP) project—the first medical-legal partnership in New Jersey—since its inception in 2008. His unwavering support for the LAMP project has not only helped the program succeed and expand to medical facilities within the RWJBarnabas system, but Mebane has also lent generously of his time to encourage and educate others about the benefits of LAMP, especially other General Counsels. LSNJ owes a debt of gratitude to David and is pleased to honor him this evening. He and his family are longtime residents of Westfield, NJ.

A banner with a blue and gold marbled background. The text "15 Years of Dedicated Service" is written in a bold, orange, sans-serif font, centered on the banner.

15 Years of Dedicated Service

Legal Assistance to Medical Patients (LAMP)

Founded in 2008 as New Jersey's first medical-legal partnership, LAMP has grown and expanded to several hospitals and health centers throughout the state. LAMP's mission is to help resolve socio-economic impediments to health experienced by referred low-income clients/patients.

Newark Beth Israel Medical Center served as LAMP's inaugural medical partner followed by Jersey City Medical Center; and St. Joseph's University Medical Center in Paterson—all made possible through grants from the Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey, Rutgers Community Health Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and The National Center for Medical-Legal Partnership.

Additional funding from the Merck Company Foundation, Pfizer, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and Bristol-Myers Squibb supported further expansion into Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital in New Brunswick; all 14 Children's Specialized Hospital sites in the state; and the Pollack Behavioral Health Services Clinic at Monmouth Medical Center.

To achieve its mission, LAMP provides substantive and ongoing training to medical providers (residents, social workers, patient navigators, nurses, and other staff) on the legal issues that negatively impact their patients' health and well-being. Referrals are then made to LAMP's legal team where attorneys—many of whom are onsite—provide representation in areas ranging from denials and terminations of federal and state benefits, such as Social Security disability and Medicaid, to matters of housing and habitability, special education, and guardianship. LAMP refers certain case-types internally to other LSNJ direct representation projects, as well as to pro bono attorneys and attorneys at the regional Legal Service programs.

Medicine, clinical care, and treatment alone cannot fully ameliorate a patient's health impediments, but understanding and addressing "social determinants of health"—the conditions in which that patient is born, grows, lives, and works—can markedly improve health and health outcomes.

NJEJLA Circle of Honor

For more than 56 years, Legal Services in New Jersey has been a central force in the struggle for civil legal justice in the state. Through the NJEJLA, we have compiled materials related to New Jersey's quest for equality to serve as a resource for educators and students.

Included in the NJEJLA is the Circle of Honor, heralding those who have made extraordinary achievements in advancing equal justice, and whose efforts and lives stand as enduring paradigms for others to emulate. The Circle of Honor furthers the NJEJLA's historical, educational, and preservation goals, and serves as an inspiration to those committed to justice.



Scan to learn more about
the NJEJLA Circle of Honor

***New Jersey Equal Justice
Library and Archive***

CIRCLE

of HONOR
2023 Inductees



*The Honorable
Joseph H. Rodriguez*



*Michael R. Cole, Esq.
(posthumously)*

NJEJLA Circle of Honor



The Honorable Joseph H. Rodriguez

United States District Judge for the District of New Jersey

The Honorable Joseph H. Rodriguez, Senior Judge in New Jersey's United States District Court, became New Jersey's first Latino District Court judge in 1985 after being nominated by then-president Ronald Reagan. The Camden native attended Camden Catholic High School (1949) and LaSalle University (A.B. 1955) and was a member of the Alpha Epsilon Honor Society, before earning his L.L.B. (1958) and J.D. (1968) from Rutgers Law Camden.

Longtime friend, fellow Camden County lawyer, and early Legal Services staffer Carl Poplar, Esq. recalls, "Joe was, at the time, only

one of four Hispanic lawyers in the state. ... It was sort of a white male dominated practice." In 1959, he was hired by Brown & Connery and "transcended anything and everything to be a member of the community."

Rodriguez's father entered the United States via a lifeboat, following a German attack on the SS Carolina as it neared the Jersey shore from Puerto Rico. Originally from Cuba, he had moved to Puerto Rico and traveled from there to the United States during World War I, eventually becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen.

"I was old enough to hear him when he was studying the Constitution," says Rodriguez. "He was impressed by certain words of the Constitution—without regard to race, creed, color, national origin. Words that are just thrown around. But he believed in that."

Rodriguez's mother was from Puerto Rico. The two took their role as the first Hispanic family in Camden seriously; helping scores of neighbors as the community grew, working with a local priest to start the first church, orchestrating the first Puerto Rican Day parade, and eventually becoming involved in local politics.

"It just so happened that I took my oath of office in the same court room where he [my father] became an American citizen," shares Rodriguez. "And I've had the opportunity now to conduct

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naturalization ceremonies myself. With that start of the law and the Constitution that I heard—you know—as a kid ... you had to live up to these principles that you believed in.”

“It was a rich cultural history,” says the judge’s daughter Lisa Rodriguez, Esq., of Dilworth Paxson LLC and member of the Legal Services of New Jersey board of trustees. “My grandparents were so proud of my father for all he accomplished and for his position in the Hispanic community in Camden.”

Over the years, Rodriguez did not stray far from his childhood home on Federal Street, but successfully navigated the divisive social and political issues of Camden, while staying true to his community and his high ideals.

During the 1960s, when the vibrant city of his youth suffered the economic impact of “white flight” and social unrest, Rodriguez was “right in the middle of those storms,” says Poplar. In 1971, when a young Hispanic man was hospitalized following a police altercation, Rodriguez worked with his friend Mayor Joseph Nardi, local law enforcement, and the governor’s office as a mediator of sorts—regularly walking the streets at night to instill calm and help ensure safety.

Rodriguez also served on the first board of Camden Legal Services and was instrumental in the success of the program. Peter O’Connor, Esq., founder, president, and CEO of Fair Share Housing Center, recalls meeting Rodriguez “at a critical juncture in the life of Legal Services.” O’Connor, who was fresh out of law school, was abruptly terminated from the Gloucester-Salem-Cumberland Legiscope program (a precursor of Legal Services) for taking on controversial causes. It was Rodriguez, along with David Epstein, Esq. and George Krueger, Esq., who secured funding from the regional program in New York needed to merge the southern counties into Camden Regional Legal Services and keep O’Connor employed.

“I’d say the most significant thing at Legal Services that I did and Joe Rodriguez played a really integral part, was the bringing of the Mount Laurel case. There were three of us involved. The chief counsel on the case was Carl Bisgaier, who had just come from Penn Law School. I had come from Georgetown; and Ken Meiser was a student, if you believe this, at Harvard, but worked full time with us in Camden. ... We were mainly just out of school for a while and we didn’t have the skills to do that effectively. And so we went over to Brown & Connery and we set up night meetings with Joe Rodriguez. We told him the problem and Joe helped us literally draft the original Mount Laurel complaint, which was filed in May of 1971, leading to two Supreme Court cases of Mount Laurel I in ’75, Mount Laurel II in 1983. Both unanimous decisions. ... That’s something that Joe never publicized, but he was an integral part of that effort, leading to probably one of the most significant civil rights and affordable housing cases in the country.”

From 1971 to 1973, Rodriguez was chair of the state’s Board of Higher Education, where he worked to make community college available in every New Jersey county and helped open

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two public universities—Ramapo College of New Jersey and Stockton University. From 1974 to 1979, he was chair of the State Commission of Investigation, where he oversaw investigations of boarding homes, nursing homes, and Medicare fraud. And from 1978 to 1979, he was president of the New Jersey State Bar Association.

Rodriguez was appointed by Governor Thomas H. Kean to become the second New Jersey Public Advocate, a position he held from February 1982 to May 1985. In 1985, he ascended to the position of U.S. District Court Judge, District of NJ, and became the first Latino in New Jersey's history to hold that position. Judge Rodriguez achieved senior status in 1998.

At 93 years old, Judge Rodriguez continues to handle cases and preside over jury trials. "He's as sharp as a tack," says Poplar. "Lawyers are thrilled to go before him. He unquestionably is considered to be one of the better federal district court judges in this region of the country. He handles some of the real controversial cases with distinction."

Despite the demands of a long and distinguished career, Rodriguez has always prioritized family. Surrounded in his chambers by dozens of photos—of wife, Barbara, his four daughters, ten grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren—he is as proud of them as he is of any other accomplishments. "I've always looked up to him," says daughter, Lisa. "I think he's pretty special."

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Michael R. Cole, Esq.

Chief Counsel to Governor Thomas Kean

Michael R. Cole grew up the second of seven siblings and the oldest of five boys in the small Union County town of Roselle Park. He attended parochial primary schools, then Marist High School and St. Peter's University (1966). He graduated from Rutgers Newark Law School in 1970 while working a full-time job in human resources before securing a clerkship with Justice C. Thomas Schettino of the New Jersey Supreme Court.

"At the time, Justice Schettino was housed in Newark with a number of other justices, including Chief Justice Weintraub," says Cole's widow and former New Jersey State Supreme Court Justice Jaynee LaVecchia. "So Michael would often recount quite fondly how much he appreciated the opportunity to learn not just from his own justice, but also from the Chief Justice, Justice [John J.] Francis, and some of the other justices that were all in the same shared chambers."



Cole joined Newark firm Clapp & Eisenberg and became a partner for a short time before accepting a position with the New Jersey Division of Law, then working his way up to first assistant attorney general under then-governor Brendan Byrne. Ross Lewin, Esq., of Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP, met Cole when he joined the division as a deputy attorney general. Says Ross, who was supervised by Cole in this position, then later recruited by him to serve on the board of Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ), "He was really a mentor to me and a hero in a lot of ways. He was a unique combination of principle and pragmatism. He had a deep sense of values in pursuing what was right and just."

When Governor Thomas H. Kean was elected to his second term in 1986, he invited Cole to leave the attorney general's office and join his staff as chief counsel.

Kean first learned of Cole when the latter was appointed to oversee a 1981 gubernatorial recount between Kean and James J. Florio. "It didn't matter who you talked to," says Kean. "Republicans, Democrats, old, young—whatever. Everybody said, you can't have a finer human being than Mike Cole." Later, when Kean needed a new chief counsel for his second term, there

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was no question in his mind. “Mike Cole was, by far, the ablest person, ablest attorney in the entire state government.”

Cole advocated for state support of Legal Services throughout his time in the Kean administration, convincing the governor that Legal Services was absolutely essential. “He had that kind of integrity, that kind of persuasive ability. You [Legal Services] couldn’t have had a better advocate.”

When Cole left government in 1989 to join Riker Danzig, LaVecchia recalls that he was disinterested in doing any lobbying work, uncomfortable with the idea of lobbying his former colleagues—with one exception. In his words, given at a Legal Services event in his honor in 2005, “I became involved in a cause that captured my mind and my heart, and that was Legal Services of New Jersey. Legal Services became the one cause for which I was proud to advocate and lobby. Becoming its advocate was easy. Talking to legislators and public officials about the necessity of Legal Services was like giving a civics lesson.”

Cole was a member of the Legal Services of New Jersey board of trustees from 1990 – 1993 and 1996 – 2008, with nine of those years (1996 – 2005) as board president. In 1997, when he left Riker Danzig to join DeCotiis, Fitzpatrick & Cole in Teaneck, he urged colleague Michael Furey, Esq., to join as well. “Mike and I had been partners at the Riker Danzig firm, and he was leaving to join the DeCotiis firm, and he thought it was important that Riker continue to have a member of the board. Doug Eakeley had served previously as a member of the Legal Services board. Then Mike had followed him, and I was the third in the line,” says Furey. “He was very unassuming and self-effacing, but he was a very, very talented lawyer. He was as bright a lawyer as I have met in New Jersey. ... He was also, I found, to be very tolerant and respectful of people who had different views. Especially in today’s time period, where so few people respect others who have different views, Mike was a stark contrast to that.”

While on the board, Cole recruited other extraordinary people to join, including retired Supreme Court justices and leaders of the Bar Association. But perhaps his greatest contribution to Legal Services was ushering through the passage of the filing fee bill to support Legal Services in New Jersey.

In response to attacks and lost funding at the federal level in 1995, Cole devised a plan to put a bill in the legislature to raise filing fees and to dedicate those filing fees to the restoration of funding for Legal Services. He secured the support of the State Bar Association. Then, in keeping with his bipartisan approach, he convinced the leadership of both parties in both houses to sponsor the bill, which passed easily and was signed in less than four months. The result was a funding increase of \$8 million, largely replacing the lost federal revenue and breathing new life into the beleaguered program.

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"He had such respect, he could pull those people in and make sure they were as committed to Legal Services as he was," says Lewin.

Dawn K. Miller, Esq., current president of LSNJ, says, "Mike Cole was a true believer, staunch supporter, and champion for Legal Services in New Jersey. Through his leadership, LSNJ achieved greater bipartisan support in the legislature, and he was instrumental for the passing of key funding legislation. LSNJ, and therefore the low income community in New Jersey, was truly blessed to have Mike's support."

Recalling what would turn out to be his last speech about Legal Services, LaVecchia shares, "Michael said in the speech that serving with Legal Services staff, the board of trustees, and ultimately, for a while, as chair of the board, was one of the most important endeavors he had ever done in his life. And, considering a man who had held so many significant positions and done so much in his life, I think that sums up best how he felt about the importance of Legal Services. It truly was near and dear to him and his life."

Prior Inductees



The Honorable James H. Coleman, Jr., *Former Justice, Supreme Court of New Jersey (2014)*



Robert Del Tufo, *Former New Jersey Attorney General (2019)*



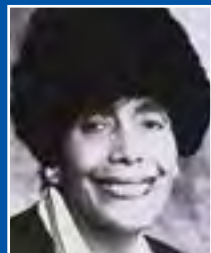
Douglas S. Eakeley, *LSNJ Board of Trustees, Former Chair, Board of Directors, Legal Services Corporation (2022)*



Kenneth C. Frazier, *Executive Chair of the Board, Merck and Co., Inc. (2017)*



The Honorable Thomas H. Kean, *48th Governor of New Jersey (2014)*



Wynona M. Lipman, *New Jersey's first Black Female State Senator (2017)*

Melville "De" Miller, Jr., *Co-founder and former president, Legal Services of New Jersey (2022)*

The Honorable Deborah T. Poritz, *First Female Chief Justice, Supreme Court of New Jersey (2017)*

Stanley C. Van Ness, *First Public Advocate, State of New Jersey (2022)*

Bonnie Watson Coleman, *U.S. Representative, New Jersey's 12th Congressional District (2019)*

Loretta Weinberg, *Former Senate Majority Leader, 37th Legislative District (2019)*

Robert N. Wilentz, *Former Chief Justice, Supreme Court of New Jersey (2019)*



NJEJLA Circle of Honor Prior Inductees

The Honorable James H. Coleman, Jr.

Former Justice, Supreme Court of New Jersey (2014)

The Honorable James H. Coleman, former New Jersey Supreme Court Justice, was born in 1933 in segregated Lawrenceville, Virginia. He attended Virginia State College and Howard School of Law, and served as LSNJ Chair of the Board from 2003-2007.

Robert Del Tufo

Former New Jersey Attorney General (2019)

Robert Del Tufo was born in 1933 in Newark. As attorney general of New Jersey, he aggressively prosecuted environmental violations and spearheaded the Office of Bias and Community Relations. He served on the LSNJ board of trustees for over three decades.

Douglas S. Eakeley

LSNJ Board of Trustees; Former Chair, Board of Directors, Legal Services Corporation (2022)

Douglas Eakeley was born in Morristown, New Jersey and graduated from Yale Law School. A steadfast supporter of Legal Services for his entire career, Doug served as board chair of both the national Legal Services Corporation and Legal Services of New Jersey.

Kenneth C. Frazier

Executive Chair of the Board, Merck and Co., Inc. (2017)

Kenneth C. Frazier was raised in North Philadelphia, and graduated from Pennsylvania State University and Harvard Law School. His extensive pro bono service includes representing a death row inmate and expanding the pro bono program at Merck & Co.

The Honorable Thomas H. Kean

48th Governor of New Jersey (2014)

The Honorable Thomas H. Kean, 48th Governor of New Jersey, was born in New York City into a family of public service stretching back to New Jersey's first governor, William Livingston. Kean served as Governor from 1982 to 1990 and is celebrated for his bipartisan style.

Wynona M. Lipman

New Jersey's first Black Female State Senator (2017)

Senator Lipman was born in LaGrange, GA and attended Talladega College, Atlanta University, and Columbia University. She taught at Essex County Community College before entering politics and, in 1971, became New Jersey's first black female senator.

NJEJLA Circle of Honor Prior Inductees

Melville “De” Miller, Jr.

Co-Founder and Former President (2022)

De Miller was one of LSNJ’s five original incorporators in 1973 and was instrumental in establishing the statewide Legal Services system that exists today. His lifelong pursuit of justice and achievements on behalf of low-income clients in New Jersey are unparalleled.

The Honorable Deborah T. Poritz

First Female Chief Justice, Supreme Court of New Jersey (2017)

Chief Justice Deborah T. Poritz was born in Brooklyn, studied English and American Literature at Columbia University and received her J.D. from the University of Pennsylvania Law School. In 1996, she became the first female Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court.

Stanley C. Van Ness

First Public Advocate, State of New Jersey (2022)

Stanley Van Ness was born in Somerville, New Jersey, and served in the Air Force before graduating from Rutgers School of Law. He served as counsel to Governor Richard J. Hughes; was the state’s first public defender; and, in 1974, became the first Public Advocate of New Jersey.

Bonnie Watson Coleman

U.S. Representative, New Jersey’s 12th Congressional District (2019)

Congresswoman Watson Coleman was born in 1945 in Camden, NJ. Her career began with the State Division on Civil Rights and the Department of Transportation. She then joined the NJ Assembly for 18 years before winning the seat for New Jersey’s 12th Congressional district.

Loretta Weinberg

Former Senate Majority Leader, 37th Legislative District (2019)

Senator Weinberg was born in New York and graduated from UC, Berkeley. She began in local and county politics and spent 12 years in the Assembly before being elected to the Senate in 2005. She has been on the forefront of issues affecting women and the LGBTQ community.

The Honorable Robert N. Wilentz

Former Chief Justice, Supreme Court of New Jersey (2019)

Chief Justice Wilentz, born in 1927 in Perth Amboy, served as Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court from 1979 until his death in 1996. He is remembered for his passion for fairness and his commitment to a responsive, accessible, and diverse court system.

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This evening we recognize individuals, law firms, and organizations that have provided full representation to at least one Legal Services referral between February 2022 and August 2023.

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Thank you for joining us this evening!

We hope you will also join us for the upcoming **Melville “De” Miller, Jr. Justice Series** on **Wednesday, December 13**. This webinar will cover issues facing the Latinx/Hispanic community in New Jersey.

The Melville “De” Miller, Jr. Justice Series, named in honor of LSNJ’s co-founder and former president, is open to the public and intended to raise awareness of important social, legal, and economic justice issues. These free events feature guest lecturers and members of the community who speak on topics of appeal to both lawyers and non-lawyers. Continuing credits are offered for lawyers.





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