

Legal Services of New Jersey

2025 EQUAL JUSTICE AWARDS RECEPTION

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



THE PALACE AT SOMERSET PARK

Somerset, New Jersey

Tuesday, April 29, 2025

President's Message

Good evening, and welcome!

Thank you for joining us tonight. It is an honor to welcome you to this year's Equal Justice Awards Reception to reflect on and celebrate the impactful contributions made to advance access to justice for all.

Each year, this event serves as a powerful reminder that the pursuit of justice is a shared and ongoing commitment. It is a responsibility that belongs to all of us, as society has a stake in ensuring equal access to legal representation, regardless of one's financial circumstances. We all have a role to play in this collective effort, and we are deeply grateful for the dedication of those who support this mission—whether you are joining us for the first time tonight or returning as a long-time ally.

We are proud to recognize the exceptional impact made by law firms, legislators, advocates, volunteer attorneys, and community organizations. Their unwavering efforts continue to advance justice for those who need it most. During this evening's program, we will:

- Honor the invaluable contributions of pro bono volunteers and partnering organizations throughout the state, who have been especially instrumental during this post-pandemic period of increased need for civil legal assistance;
- Acknowledge the commitment of Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz, whose efforts have significantly advanced the cause of justice for low-income individuals; and
- Induct The Honorable Shelia Y. Oliver, posthumously, into the NJEJLA Circle of Honor, forever memorializing her extraordinary contributions that have helped move us closer to justice.

We gather at a time of special challenges to Legal Services and the low-income individuals and families we represent. At both the national and state levels, threats to equal justice loom large. In addition, our state and nation continue to face a widespread denial of civil legal rights for those who cannot afford legal representation. Indeed, low-income New Jerseyans do not receive any or enough legal help for nearly nine in ten of their civil legal problems. Unrepresented defendants face a steep battle as they struggle to navigate the complexities of court processes and procedures without a full understanding of their rights, the relevant legal terminology, or the various steps in the court process, often with devastating consequences. The promise of our democracy—equal justice under the law—is still out of reach for far too many.

Together, we can create a future where access to legal representation is no longer a privilege, but a fundamental right that is available to all. Let us leave here tonight more determined than ever to bring that vision to life.

Thank you once again for your support and for being part of this critical mission.

Dawn K. Miller, Esq., President
Legal Services of New Jersey
April 29, 2025

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Equal Justice Champion



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Cynthia M. Jacob, Esq.

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Equal Justice Friends

John P. Kahn, Esq.

Dawn K. Miller, Esq.

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 2025 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 significant contributors is described in the program. Each will be called to the stage to receive their award.

Order of Proceedings

Presentation of LSNJ Board of Trustees Resolution

Michael K. Furey, Esq.

Day Pitney

Presentation of Special Award

The Lipman-Franks Award

Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz

New Jersey Senator for District 29

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

The Honorable Sheila Y. Oliver (posthumously)

Lieutenant Governor of the State of New Jersey

Closing Thoughts

Dawn K. Miller, Esq.

President, Legal Services of New Jersey



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RESOLUTION OF THE LEGAL SERVICES OF NEW JERSEY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

WHEREAS, Michael Furey, Esq. joined the Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ) Board of Trustees in December 1997 and recently retired at the end of December 2024.

WHEREAS, Michael Furey, a longtime and dedicated member of the Board of Trustees of Legal Services of New Jersey, Inc., for 28 years has provided exceptional service and leadership throughout his tenure on the Board, demonstrating commitment to the success and growth of the organization; and

WHEREAS, Michael Furey, as one of Legal Services of New Jersey's longest-standing Board members, is widely esteemed among the Board and the Legal Services' management team for his wisdom and insight, calm and methodical manner, and consummate professionalism. Michael Furey is recognized for his voice of reason and, when necessary, skillfully playing the role of conciliator during debates or difficult decision-making.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the entire Board formally extends its deep and sincerest gratitude to Michael Furey for his years of service on the Board, his lasting impact on the organization, and his deep-seated commitment to Legal Services of New Jersey and its mission to secure equal justice for all New Jerseyans.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board recognizes and thanks Michael Furey for the significant impact and immeasurable value his leadership and problem-solving abilities have brought to the organization, particularly as Legal Services navigated both challenges and opportunities.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board extends its best wishes for Michael Furey's future endeavors, with sincere hopes for continued success, health, and happiness in retirement.

IN WITNESS THEREOF, the undersigned have executed this Resolution on the 10th day of March 2025 on behalf of the Board of Trustees of Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ).

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Cynthia Jacob", written over a horizontal line.

Cynthia Jacob, Esq.
Board Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John P. Kahn", written over a horizontal line.

John P. Kahn, Esq.
Board Secretary

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Dawn K. Miller", written over a horizontal line.

Dawn K. Miller, Esq.
President



STATE OF NEW JERSEY
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
P.O. BOX 001
TRENTON
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PHILIP D. MURPHY
GOVERNOR

April 2, 2025

Dear Friends,

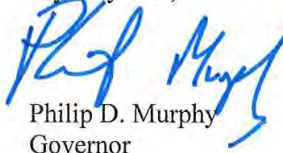
On behalf of the State of New Jersey, I am honored to join in spirit with the Legal Services of New Jersey at their Equal Justice Awards reception honoring and celebrating the life and legacy of the best partner in government, trailblazer and pioneer Lieutenant Governor Sheila Y. Oliver, as she will be inducted into the Equal Justice Library and Archive Circle of Honor.

Sheila led a political career unequal to match having served our community with unwavering passion and commitment that showed every day in the State House. While serving the City of Newark and then as an Essex County Freeholder, Sheila was known as a woman of principle and put her community first. As an assemblywoman and Assembly Speaker she was equally respected by so many on both sides of the political aisle, having served all the people of her district and state at-large regardless of political affiliation, with equal commitment. To this end, she is owed a great debt of gratitude from us all and we are forever grateful for her momentous contributions to her commitment, and she is an example all of us in public office should follow.

Sheila's induction to the New Jersey Equal Justice Library and Archive Circle of Honor is a rightly deserved honor. Thank you to the Legal Services of New Jersey for remembering her legacy and highlighting the significant contributions she has made to our Great State. I am sure the honor you are providing her is just as beautiful as she was, and her well-deserved induction to the Equal Justice Library will serve as a testament to the inspiration and hope she had on many generations for years to come.

Best wishes for a memorable and enjoyable event.

My very best,


Philip D. Murphy
Governor

About the Awards

New Jersey Equal Justice Library and Archive Circle of Honor

For 59 years, Legal Services in New Jersey has been a central force in the struggle for civil legal justice in this state. Through the New Jersey Equal Justice Library and Archive (NJEJLA), LSNJ preserves 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 Circle of Honor inductee, the Honorable Sheila Y. Oliver joins Michael R. Cole, Chief Counsel to Governor Thomas H. Kean and former chair of the LSNJ Board of Trustees; The Honorable James H. Coleman, Jr., former justice, Supreme Court of New Jersey, and former chair of the LSNJ Board of Trustees; Robert Del Tufo, former attorney general of New Jersey and former member of the LSNJ Board of Trustees; Douglas S. Eakeley, former chair of the LSNJ Board of Trustees and former chair of the LSC Board of Directors; Kenneth C. Frazier, former president and CEO of Merck and Co., Inc., current executive chair of Merck's board of directors, and former member of the LSNJ Board of Trustees; 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 of LSNJ; The Honorable Deborah T. Poritz, former chief justice, Supreme Court of New Jersey, and former chair of the LSNJ Board of Trustees; The Honorable Joseph H. Rodriguez, United States District Judge for the District of New Jersey; Stanley C. Van Ness, the first Public Advocate in New Jersey; Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman, U.S. Representative, New Jersey's 12th Congressional District; Loretta Weinberg, former New Jersey Senate majority leader; and The Honorable Robert N. Wilentz, former chief justice, Supreme Court of New Jersey.

The Lipman-Franks Award

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.

About the Awards

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

Recognizing individuals, law firms, and organizations that have made major contributions to Legal Services' pro bono programs throughout the state from February 2023 to August 2024. 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.

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 awardees honored from each New Jersey Legal Services program.

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 needed services to the low-income community over time.

Full Representation Contributors

Recognizing individuals, law firms, and organizations that have provided full representation to at least one Legal Services referral between February 2023 and August 2024.

Major Contributors

Central Jersey Legal Services

Shaun Peterson, Esq.

David Stein, Esq.

Essex-Newark Legal Services

Housing Justice and Tenants Solidarity Clinic of Rutgers Law Newark

Victor Monterrosa, Jr., Esq.

Alaina Thomas, Esq.

Legal Services of New Jersey

Jack Feinstein, Esq.
Charles Goeke, Esq.
Yongmoon Kim, Esq.
Ira Metrick, Esq.
Andy Winchell, Esq.

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Janet Fair, Esq.

Laura Ginkel, Esq.
Dianne Pecoraro, Esq.
Patrick Reh fuss, Esq.
John Todaro, Esq.

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Stuart Gavzy, Esq.
Doris Masse, Esq.
William McInerney, Esq.
Fumiko Takada, Esq.

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Cory Woerner, Esq.
Tamika Wyche, Esq.

Exceptional Contributors

Central Jersey Legal Services

Shaun S. Peterson, Esq.

Shaun Peterson is a graduate of The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) and Seton Hall Law School. He is in his fifth year as an associate at Hoagland, Longo, Moran, Dunst & Doukas, LLP in New Brunswick, where he is a member of the firm's Transactional Group. Practice areas include property tax appeal, commercial and residential real estate transactions, landlord-tenant, and municipal government. Peterson began volunteering with Central Jersey Legal Services in 2021. His first case involved helping a client obtain a guardianship. Peterson expressed that he enjoys this area of law because he is able to get the client the help he or she needs to take care of an incapacitated individual. He also provides pro bono representation for cases involving name changes, believing that it is important for the client to feel comfortable with their own identity after a divorce. Peterson enjoys providing pro bono services to our clients because he believes that those in need of legal assistance should not be denied representation due to their socioeconomic status.

Essex-Newark Legal Services

Carl Levitt, Esq.

For five years, Carl Levitt was a staff attorney in the ENLS housing unit dedicated to the cause of equal justice and especially to the cause of improving housing conditions and opportunities for Essex County's low-income families. In 2023, Levitt left ENLS for private practice. Now, as a solo practitioner, Levitt has committed himself to empowering individuals to take action through advocacy, education, relationship building, and litigation. A regular contributor to ENLS' Private Attorney Involvement (PAI) program, Levitt handled eight cases for full representation in 2024, covering the recovery of security deposits, illegal evictions, and other tenancy matters.

Legal Services of New Jersey

Bill Singer, Esq.

Bill Singer of Singer & Fedun is a nationally recognized legal specialist and pioneer in the area of LGBTQ+ rights. Singer has been a pro bono volunteer for LSNJ since 2016, when he agreed to represent every single transgender or gender non-binary client seeking a legal name change. These cases also involve helping clients with gender marker changes for their

Exceptional Contributors

official identification documents. Not only has Singer represented dozens of LSNJ clients in this regard; he has also offered support and training to other volunteers, providing guidance through the name and gender marker change process and addressing best practices in representing and working with transgender and gender non-binary clients. Singer and members of his firm, collectively, have given generously of their time to assist Legal Services clients. Singer is the recipient of numerous awards, including most recently, the Dan Bradley Award presented by the National LGBTQ+ Bar Association in 2024.

Legal Services of Northwest Jersey

Lori Hirsch, Esq.

Lori Hirsch worked at Merck for over 25 years as managing counsel. Most recently, she was vice president for Regulatory Compliance and External Engagement at Bristol Myers Squibb. Over the past year, Hirsch has volunteered almost every week for LSNWJ's eviction diversion clinic at the Somerville landlord-tenant court, where she represents tenants facing eviction. Taking cases on the spot, Hirsch typically handles one to two cases at a time, providing immediate and critical advocacy for individuals at their most vulnerable. Hirsch's pro bono service with LSNWJ began during her career at Merck, where she first volunteered and led a team of Merck volunteers at the tenancy clinic. Following her retirement, she reached out to continue her advocacy for tenants, underscoring her deep commitment to access to justice. Hirsch is not only tremendously reliable and knowledgeable, but she also brings a compassionate and caring approach to every case she handles, ensuring tenants feel supported during an incredibly stressful time in their lives.

Northeast New Jersey Legal Services

Scura Wigfield Heyer Stevens Cammarota LLP

Scura Wigfield Heyer Stevens Cammarota LLP has been providing pro bono legal assistance to NNJLS clients since 2008, when partner John J. Scura III began representing clients in the bankruptcy process and later expanded his role by hosting regular bankruptcy clinics with clients. During the COVID-19 pandemic, David Stevens, Esq., transitioned to a virtual format for the bankruptcy clinics and assumed oversight of NNJLS client referrals and case placement. All of the Scura volunteers go above and beyond, offering legal representation and advising clients on post-bankruptcy best practices to help them maintain financial stability. In 2024, the Scura Firm volunteers assisted 28 clients with their bankruptcies. Those volunteers include Aiden

Exceptional Contributors

Murphy, Esq., Paul Evangelista, Esq., Jamal Romero, Esq., Diana Woody, Esq., Mr. Stevens, and Vasti Majano, Esq. NNJLS is deeply grateful for the Scura Firm's dedication, compassion, and profound impact on the lives of our clients. Their work truly exemplifies the values of our organization.

South Jersey Legal Services

Donna L. Freidel, Esq., and Talbot B. Kramer, Esq.

Over many years, Donna Freidel and Talbot Kramer have demonstrated their commitment to pro bono services and in various areas of the law. Freidel & Kramer, P.C. has been a staunch supporter of the SJLS Private Attorney Involvement Program (PAI) since 2009. Since that time, Freidel and Kramer have accepted pro bono cases in areas of law including guardianship, expungement, divorce, children's Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits, consumer, education, and public benefits. Since August 2023 alone, the firm has accepted four guardianship cases, a children's SSI case, and many divorces. With only two lawyers in the firm, it is exceptional that they always says yes when asked to help, always show the care and compassion that our clients deserve, and always keep our program updated on the status of its cases. Freidel and Kramer also always request a new case when they finish one. They have a heart for underserved people, and it shows. Their kindness, thoroughness, and professionalism are unmatched.

Significant Contributors

Legal Services of New Jersey

Covenant House New Jersey, Human Trafficking Victim Services

Covenant House New Jersey's Human Trafficking Victim Services team has been an indispensable partner of the LSNJ PROTECT Anti-Trafficking Project since the early days of the initiative. Their dedicated case managers play a crucial role in stabilizing trafficking survivors so they can successfully address their legal matters and rebuild their lives. Survivors often exit their trafficking deeply traumatized and lacking basic necessities—shelter, financial resources, social support, sometimes even adequate clothing. Through their 24-hour hotline, Covenant House's team provides immediate, comprehensive assistance as New Jersey's statewide human trafficking service provider. Their support spans every aspect of a survivor's recovery journey, from providing transportation to attorney meetings and coordinating medical care, to assisting with grocery shopping and accompanying clients to government offices for benefits applications. Perhaps most critically, they secure safe housing for survivors who have nowhere else to turn. If a survivor has a need, Covenant House's case managers have likely found a way to address it. The team's exceptional responsiveness and collaborative spirit make them invaluable partners in serving trafficking survivors.

Legal Services of Northwest Jersey

David Culley, Esq.

David Culley is Board of Trustees Treasurer for the Hunterdon County Bar Association, a veteran, and a superintendent of Veteran's Haven North, a VA-operated transitional housing program for veterans experiencing homelessness. In 2022, Culley reached out to LSNWJ to identify support for the veterans residing at Veteran's Haven North, whose legal issues were impacting their housing and income stability. Culley's leadership and partnership were instrumental in the launch of legal clinics, enabling LSNWJ to schedule regular meetings and provide legal assistance to veterans. His proactive efforts in outreach to veterans have ensured that LSNWJ is able to provide assistance to veterans on expungements, public entitlements, family, and consumer matters. Culley's dedication to the veteran community has transformed countless lives. He tirelessly identifies resources and assistance for veterans; his compassionate and thoughtful approach fosters trust and empowers veterans to seek the help they need. Through his partnership, the number of veterans served by LSNWJ has tripled, creating lasting stability for those who have served our nation.

Significant Contributors

Northeast New Jersey Legal Services

Georgene Sfraga Panza, Esq.

Georgene Sfraga Panza began volunteering with NNJLS in 2008, following her retirement as a Vice President at New York Life Insurance Company. In 2011, she transitioned to an in-house volunteer role, committing to weekly service for at least 10 weeks. Fourteen years later, she remains a dedicated weekly volunteer. Currently, Panza supports clients through the uncontested divorce process, guiding them through the complaint, explaining the service of process, and preparing them so they know what to expect. In the past 18 months alone, she has assisted over 35 clients in navigating this process. Over 14 years with NNJLS, Panza has helped hundreds of clients. NNJLS is deeply grateful for her unwavering dedication and the significant impact she has had on our clients' lives.

South Jersey Legal Services

Expungement Law Project at Rutgers Law Camden

The Rutgers Expungement Law Project clinical program (the "Project") has made significant contributions to pro bono services and has been particularly valuable in recent years to the SJLS Private Attorney Involvement Program (PAI). Professor Meredith L. Schalick started the Project in 2018. Through its association with SJLS PAI, 18 clients were initially financially screened and referred for expungement assistance at the start of the clinical program. Each year since, Schalick has requested that SJLS refer additional eligible clients to the Project for assistance. After intake, screening, and document gathering by SJLS PAI, the Project pairs clients with a group of Rutgers Law students who assist the clients in filing expungement applications. Almost two hundred clients have been referred to the Project to date. In addition, in 2018 and 2019, the Rutgers Project hosted several expungement community outreach events to help bring awareness to local individuals and community groups of the expungement services available through Rutgers and SJLS. In 2022, 2023, and 2024, PAI and Rutgers worked together to host expungement events at various locations throughout South Jersey. The Project serves a very real need in the community and has made very significant contributions to the Legal Services community. Finally, the individuals who work in the Rutgers Project—Clinical Professor of Law Meredith L. Schalick, Associate Professor of Law Sandra Simkins, Viktoria Zerda, Esq., and the many law students over the years—consistently strive to accept as many cases as possible and to achieve the best outcome for clients.

Lipman-Franks Award

New Jersey Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz

Senator Ruiz became the first Puerto Rican elected to the Senate in 2007 and is currently the highest-ranking Latina legislator in state history. She is the Senate Majority Leader and Vice-Chair of the Senate Legislative Oversight Committee, and previously served as chair of the Senate Education Committee. Throughout her time in the Senate, Ruiz has fought for equity in educational spaces and is the leading force in expanding access to early childhood education throughout the state. She also spearheaded the law building on the federal free and reduced meal program so that all qualifying students could receive breakfast and lunch at no cost, eliminating the reduced category.

Senator Ruiz has focused on expanding employment opportunities for underserved communities, sponsoring bill packages to expand apprenticeship programs in the state. The enacted apprenticeship package created more accessible pathways to careers in high-growth industries by incentivizing business participation in apprenticeship programs. In addition, she has taken a targeted approach to mitigating the barriers that prevent people of color from obtaining and retaining full time teaching positions by advancing legislation to establish educator apprenticeship programs, provide loan redemption opportunities, and expand alternate route programs.

Furthering her agenda to support new mothers, parents, and families, in 2021 Senator Ruiz sponsored a law to provide all New Jersey parents access to one cost-free newborn home visit, creating the most comprehensive nurse visitation program in the nation. Senator Ruiz was also the prime sponsor of a 2020 law to allow candidates to use campaign funds to cover childcare expenses incurred due to campaign activities.

The Senator received a bachelor's degree from Drew University. She was a 2010 Aspen Institute Rodell Fellow and a graduate of the Harvard Kennedy School's Senior Executives in State and Local Government Program. She is vice chair of the Essex County Democratic Party and deputy chief of staff to Essex County Executive Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr. She served as a delegate to the Democratic National Conventions in 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016.

A steadfast supporter of New Jersey's Legal Services programs, Senator Ruiz is deeply aware of the need for civil legal services for the low-income community in New Jersey. She has worked with LSNJ and its leadership in various capacities, including legislative advocacy to address important civil legal issues and to promote a deeper understanding of "True Poverty," community education and awareness, and crucial support in LSNJ's funding efforts, all to help secure equal justice for those in poverty and strengthen families in New Jersey. Senator Ruiz's accomplishments and her dedication to equal justice cannot be overstated.

NJEJLA Circle of Honor

The New Jersey Equal Justice Library and Archive (NJEJLA) was launched in 2014 in order to chronicle the arc of justice in New Jersey and provide 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 2025 Inductee



*The Honorable Sheila Y. Oliver
(posthumously)*

NJEJLA Circle of Honor



Sheila Yvette Oliver

(July 14, 1952 – August 1, 2023)

Former Lieutenant Governor of New Jersey

Sheila Yvette Oliver served as New Jersey's Lieutenant Governor from January 2018 until her passing in August 2023.

Raised in an ethnically diverse Newark neighborhood and a politically-engaged family, Oliver was encouraged from an early age to be a critical thinker and to advocate for social justice. An avid reader and historian, she credits two books—"A Tale of Two Cities" and "The Grapes of Wrath"—with further deepening her sensitivity to the effects of inequality.

She graduated cum laude in 1974 with a Bachelor of Arts in sociology from Lincoln

University, the oldest of the country's Historically Black Colleges and Universities and stated in a 2021 Black History Month interview with the Governor's office that prior graduates such as Thurgood Marshall and Langston Hughes, "without question, influenced my thought and my participation in advocacy and progressive social issues that are of benefit of the Black community."

From Lincoln University, Oliver went on to earn her Master of Social Work from Columbia University in 1976 before launching her long and distinguished career advocating for equality and social justice.

Oliver served on the Board of Education of the East Orange School District (1994 – 2000), including one year as Board President. She served on the Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders from District Three (1996 – 1999) and taught college-level courses as an adjunct faculty member at Essex County College and Caldwell University. Oliver then went on to represent the 34th legislative district in the New Jersey General Assembly (2004 – 2018), where she served on the Commerce and Economic Development Committee, the Transportation and Independent Authorities Committee, the Joint Committee on Economic Justice and Equal Employment Opportunity, and the Joint Committee on the Public Schools. In 2010, she became the first Black woman to serve as speaker of the General Assembly—a position she held until 2014.

NJEJLA Circle of Honor

In 2017, Democratic gubernatorial nominee Phil Murphy chose Oliver as his running mate. With that win, Oliver became the first Black woman to serve as lieutenant governor of New Jersey and the first woman of color elected to statewide office in New Jersey. In addition to her role as Lieutenant Governor, Oliver served as Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs, where she led efforts to strengthen and expand initiatives for fair and affordable housing, community revitalization, and homelessness prevention.

Former New Jersey Senator Loretta Weinberg remembers Oliver as a partner in efforts such as marriage equality and pay equity. “She was there as a leader, as a voice, and somebody who helped us get through the first, strongest pay equity law of any state.”

Always a friend to Legal Services, “Sheila Oliver was unwavering in her support for equal justice for all and for the Legal Services in New Jersey statewide system,” says LSNJ President, Dawn K. Miller, Esq.

Says U.S. Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman, “She was eloquent and elegant—a brilliant speaker and an example for young women, Black or otherwise.”

Niece Renee and nephew Charles—both heavily influenced by their aunt throughout their lives—have spearheaded the new Sheila Y. Oliver Civic Association since her death in 2023. The Association strives to keep her memory alive by “empowering underserved communities to achieve both economic and social success, as well as educating and developing young women of color who are interested in government, public policy, and community organizing.” They recall their Aunt Sheila’s ability to treat everyone, regardless of stature or economic status, with dignity and respect. “She used to say to me, ‘The only time you look down on a person is if you’re offering a hand to help them up,’” says Charles. And Renee—“All the awards and all the titles are obviously good and grand, but I think Sheila Oliver was truly, truly about helping those who need it.”



Prior Inductees

Michael R. Cole, *Chief Counsel to Governor Thomas H. Kean; Former Chair, LSNJ Board of Trustees (2023)*

The Honorable James H. Coleman, Jr., *Former Justice, Supreme Court of New Jersey (2014); Former Board Chair, LSNJ Board of Trustees*

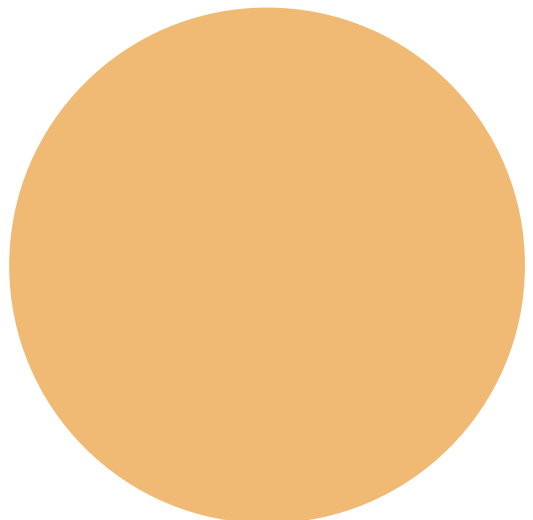
Robert Del Tufo, *Former New Jersey Attorney General (2019); Former Member, LSNJ Board of Trustees*

Douglas S. Eakeley, *Former Chair, 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); Former Chair, LSNJ Board of Trustees



The Honorable Joseph H. Rodriguez, United States District Judge for the District of New Jersey (2023)



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

Michael R. Cole

Chief Counsel, Governor Thomas H. Kean; Former Chair, LSNJ Board of Trustees (2023)

Michael R. Cole was known for being an honest, principled man respected across both parties. He was a strong advocate for Legal Services, including being the driving force behind a bipartisan bill to restore funding for Legal Services amidst budget cuts.

The Honorable James H. Coleman, Jr.

Former Justice, Supreme Court of New Jersey (2014); LSNJ Board of Trustees

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 2006-2010.

Robert Del Tufo

Former New Jersey Attorney General (2019); LSNJ Board of Trustees

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, LSC Board of Directors (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.

NJEJLA Circle of Honor Prior Inductees

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, Georgia, 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.

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); LSNJ Board of Trustees

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. Chief Justice Poritz served as LSNJ Chair of the Board from 2011-2017.

The Honorable Joseph H. Rodriguez

United States District Judge for the District of New Jersey (2023)

The Honorable Joseph H. Rodriguez earned his law degree from Rutgers Law Camden in 1968 and became New Jersey's first Latino District Court judge in 1985. He served on the first board of Camden Legal Services and has held a number of important positions, including as the state's Public Advocate under Governor Thomas H. Kean.

NJEJLA Circle of Honor Prior Inductees

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, New Jersey. 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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Office in Essex County

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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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