

2014 Equal Justice Honorees

Equal Justice Medals

Private Attorneys

Joseph Albanese
James Banks
Irina B. Elgart
David C. Epler
Daniel Frischberg
Lori F. Hirsch

Henry L. Kent-Smith
Robert E. Lytle
Edward L. Paul
Jose D. Roman
John C. Shamy
Mark B. Watson

Firms

Ciardi, Ciardi & Astin
Trenk, DePasquale, Della
Fera & Sodono

In-House Volunteers

Ferdinand Fernandez
Vishnu Khemraj
Becky J. Liken
Dorothy Razawich

Charitable Foundations

The Robin Hood Foundation

The Hurricane Sandy New
Jersey Relief Foundation

Legislative Leaders

Senate President
Stephen M. Sweeney

Assembly Speaker
Vincent Prieto

Senate Minority Leader
Thomas H. Kean, Jr.

Assembly Minority Leader
Jon M. Bramnick

The Lipman-Franks Award – Senator Peter J. Barnes, III

The Richard J. Hughes Career Public Service Award – Senator Loretta Weinberg

Installation of the Thomas H. Kean Award for Leadership in the Advancement of Racial and Economic Justice and Civil Society

Presentation of the first Kean Award – The Honorable James H. Coleman



More Concerning Our Honorees

Thomas H. Kean served as the 48th governor of New Jersey from 1982 to 1990, and subsequently went on to become the 10th president of Drew University. He later achieved global recognition as chairman of the 9/11 Commission investigating the causes of the 2001 terrorist attack. He is often cited in the media as the most popular governor in New Jersey's history. In 1988 he authored *The Politics of Inclusion*, in which he wrote "I have tried to show... that responsible government can meet people's needs and bring them together, that government can make a difference in the way we live." His career reveals a continuing commitment to both speech and action designed to secure racial justice, overcome economic disadvantage, and promote humane and fair resolution of social discord.

James H. Coleman, Jr., the son of a sharecropper who was raised within the confines of segregation in the south, in 1994 became the first African American to be appointed to the New Jersey Supreme Court, sitting as an associate justice until 2003. Earlier as an Appellate Division judge in 1985, he wrote the crucial decision that declared unconstitutional the then-practice by prosecutors of eliminating potential jurors because of their race. He has served as chairman of the Legal Services of New Jersey board, and today is Of Counsel at Porzio, Bromberg & Newman.

Stephen M. Sweeney, a member of the New Jersey Senate since 2002, has served as president of the upper house since 2010, and earlier was the majority leader there. The former director of the Gloucester County Board of Chosen Freeholders, he has been a major force in protecting the rights of workers, children with disabilities, and other people facing disadvantage. He led this year's legislative push to secure increased Legal Services appropriations through court filing fee increases.

Vincent Prieto, now in his first year as speaker of the New Jersey Assembly, has served in the lower house since 2004—his first elective office. The Cuban-born lawmaker, who also serves as code official for Secaucus, has been in the forefront in advancing legislation protecting consumers with utility purchases, as well as sponsoring various public safety measures. His personal leadership was of critical importance in securing final Assembly passage of the filing fee legislation.

Thomas H. Kean, Jr., the minority leader of the New Jersey Senate for the past seven years, has been a member of the upper house since 2003. He previously served in the state Assembly for 20 months. His legislative accomplishments have included environmental protection efforts, safeguards for the state's unemployment fund, and measures eliminating smoking in workplaces and public venues. His caucus provided important support for the year's filing fee legislation.

Jon M. Bramnick, minority leader of the New Jersey Assembly for the past three years, has served in the upper house since 2003, and earlier on the Plainfield City Council for eight years. Over the years, he has been an adjunct professor at Rutgers and Rider, and is often cited in the media for his stand-up comedy performances at charity fundraisers. Through his leadership, the Assembly's Republican caucus provided the critical votes necessary for final passage of the filing fee legislation.

Loretta Weinberg, the majority leader of the New Jersey Senate, joined the upper house in 2005 after serving a dozen years in the state Assembly. Throughout her career she has been a steadfast and courageous advocate to improve the lives of all disadvantaged people, with a particular focus on women and those facing disabilities. She has long been a strong supporter of the state's Legal Services program.

Peter J. Barnes, III, now in his first year as a member of the New Jersey Senate, served for seven years in the state Assembly and many years as a member and president of the Edison Township Council and numerous other positions in local government. He has focused much of his legislative career on environmental, zoning and public safety issues, and has been one of the legislature's most ardent supporters for additional funding for Legal Services of New Jersey.

Northeast New Jersey Legal Services (NNJLS)

James Banks. Since 2009, Mr. Banks has conducted over 40 expungement clinics in Passaic, Bergen, and Hudson counties and handled over 35 individual expungement and bankruptcy pro bono cases, contributing over 250 hours to NNJLS clients.

Central Jersey Legal Services (CJLS)

Robert E. Lytle has been accepting cases from CJLS' Trenton office for over 10 years specializing in expungements. In the last three years alone, he has accepted 10 such cases. As a Trustee of the Mercer County Bar Association, Mr. Lytle has also been instrumental in stimulating the Bar's continued involvement in the Volunteer Lawyers Project and its overall support of the work of CJLS.

Jose D. Roman. A trial attorney with practices in New York and New Jersey, Mr. Roman has accepted pro bono referrals from CJLS, particularly in tort case defenses, since 2011. One such matter consumed 44 hours before it was dismissed.

Mark B. Watson has been taking pro bono referrals from CJLS since 2007. He concentrates on expungements, typically taking five to six referrals at one time.

Legal Services of Northwest Jersey (LSNWJ)

Henry L. Kent-Smith and Irina B. Elgart. Three years ago, the Township of Allamuchy in Warren County advised tenants residing in its low-income housing that their rent would be raised to market rent and if they could not afford the new rent that they must vacate their units. A number of the tenants turned to LSNWJ for help. Henry L. Kent-Smith and Irina B. Elgart of the Princeton office of Fox Rothschild, LLP joined LSNWJ as co-counsel. Mr. Kent-Smith guided the litigation and negotiations, while Ms. Elgart handled the day-to-day work on the cases. The case was recently settled with the units being preserved as affordable housing units until the year 2037, along with damages. Fox Rothschild waived its claim for attorneys' fee, resulting in the entire fee being awarded to LSNWJ.

Lori F. Hirsch, corporate counsel at Merck, Sharp & Dohme, has been a volunteer attorney in LSNWJ's tenancy project for eight years, assisting low-income tenants facing eviction, and preventing eviction and homelessness for scores of families. She typically represents tenancy clients at 8 to 10 court dates annually. As pro bono coordinator for the Whitehouse Station campus of Merck, she brought in new volunteer attorneys and legal assistants from the law firm of Reed Smith and the general counsel's office of the Chubb Group, quadrupling the number of low-income tenants receiving legal assistance.

South Jersey Legal Services (SJLS)

David C. Epler. Since 2011, Mr. Epler has accepted 22 divorce cases for pro bono representation. Mr. Epler is especially valuable to SJLS because whenever he finishes a case and sends the final judgment of divorce, he always asks that another case be sent. There is never a time when he does not have at least two pro bono cases.

Edward J. Paul has volunteered with SJLS for years. Since 2011, Mr. Paul has accepted 15 bankruptcy cases for pro bono representation through the Pro Bono Bankruptcy Project, a joint project among SJLS, the local bankruptcy bench and bar and Rutgers School of Law–Camden.

Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ)

Joseph Albanese is a sole practitioner with an office in Forked River, accepting bankruptcy, consumer and foreclosure matters. His cases have involved emergency Chapter 13s, loan modifications and multiple statutory defenses. He is one of a small group of pro bono attorneys handling Chapter 13s, often in conjunction with foreclosures. Among his cases was a foreclosure TILA avoidance action in which he was successful in his cross motion for summary judgment, and which resulted in a reported decision by the Bankruptcy court (Judge Lyons). That case took several years to resolve.

Daniel Frischberg was a sole practitioner who has recently become Of Counsel to the Wismur law firm in Marlton. He takes difficult bankruptcy and consumer cases, and is a trainer for LSNJ consumer courses. In addition to representing LSNJ referrals, Mr. Frischberg also accepts cases from South Jersey Legal Services. He is currently the “Attorney of the Month” on LSNJ’s PROBONONJ website.

John C. Shamy, a sole practitioner in Somerset, has accepted pro bono cases since 1997, including bankruptcy, domestic violence, and expungement matters, frequently handling more than one referral at a time. He also mentors new and inexperienced attorneys in handling bankruptcy and domestic violence cases. In recent years he has averaged seven or more pro bono matters annually, and has also taken cases from LSNWJ. When cases are circulated to the LSNJ pro bono panel he rarely fails to take at least one, often when he is also currently representing another pro bono client.

Firms

Ciardi Ciardi & Astin firm attorneys have volunteered with SJLS for the past five years. Since 2011, Ciardi Ciardi & Astin attorneys have accepted 36 bankruptcy cases for pro bono representation. After handling one bankruptcy for a veteran, Mr. Ciardi collaborated with Daniel Astin and Colonel Frank Ryan to found the Military Assistance Project, a nonprofit organization which provides direct and free legal services for active duty, reserve, or veteran military personnel in the form of pro bono bankruptcy services. Ciardi Ciardi & Astin continues to take cases from SJLS.

Trenk, DePasquale, Della Fera & Sodono. Beginning in 2008, there were two name partners and one associate enrolled with LSNJ and cases were referred out to them. In 2013, three additional associates enrolled, and three more joined in 2014. All nine have taken cases. A video portrait of Sam Della Fera, Jr. is on LSNJ's pro bono website. Another of the partners, Anthony Sodano, III, previously received an individual pro bono award. The firm has created a culture of pro bono. In a firm of 26 attorneys, more than a third have taken and continue to take cases from LSNJ.

In-House Volunteers

Ferdinand Fernandez. Since 2013, Mr. Fernandez has contributed 1,400 hours in pro bono work as an In-House volunteer attorney at Northeast New Jersey Legal Services, and has taken 72 cases. He comes to the office five days a week, occasionally even Saturdays. Mr. Fernandez has handled cases in several areas of law, including custody and child support, housing, public benefits, domestic violence, taxes, and SSI.

Vishnu Khemraj. Since 2012, Vishnu has contributed 1,949 pro bono hours at Northeast New Jersey Legal Services (NNJLS). In addition to managing his own private practice, he serves as an In-House volunteer attorney at NNJLS four to five times a week. Mr. Khemraj has helped 185 clients during his time at NNJLS in the areas of immigration, family, and housing, and has also given more than 15 clinics in the areas of naturalization and divorce.

Becky J. Liken has been a consistent volunteer at Legal Services of New Jersey since 2010, contributing more than 1,800 hours. She began at LSNJ on the statewide legal hotline. She moved on to LSNJ's Senior Citizen Legal Rights project, where she assisted on an *amicus* case before the New Jersey Supreme Court, as well as assisting individual clients. Recently, Ms. Liken turned her commitment and dedication to LSNJ's SSI Project, where she supports clients during the Social Security claim process through comprehensive interviews, merit assessments and other support.

Dorothy Razawich, an experienced attorney, worked for many years in Legal Services, and has volunteered with ENLS since early 2011. She works approximately 10 to 12 hours per week. She was doing elder law, bankruptcy, and consumer defense work until January 2013, when she switched to the ENLS housing unit. Since that time, she has been handling intake and going to court on those matters. During her tenure as a volunteer, she has handled over 250 cases.

Charitable Foundations

Robin Hood Foundation. Immediately after Hurricane Sandy, the New York City based Robin Hood Foundation stepped into provide tens of millions of dollars to a wide array of disaster relief services in New York and New Jersey. This support included funding Legal Services of New Jersey and two regional Legal Services programs to provide civil legal assistance to Sandy victims. That assistance continued through this September, and amounted to more than one million dollars. Robin Hood also assisted two smaller legal aid providers.

Hurricane Sandy New Jersey Relief Foundation. Formed shortly after Hurricane Sandy under the leadership of New Jersey First Lady Mary Pat Christie, Hurricane Sandy New Jersey Relief Fund provided tens of millions of dollars in disaster relief aid to New Jersey Sandy victims. Included in this assistance have been grants to Legal Services of New Jersey and another smaller legal assistance provider to provide important legal assistance to victims.