

Moving From Poverty to Justice

A Quarterly Report From Legal Services of New Jersey Fall 2019

2019 Equal Justice Awards Reception



LSNJ President De Miller with 2019 Exceptional Pro Bono Awardees (continuing from left) Tikesha M. James, Tamika Wyche, Bhavini Tara Shah, Bernice Martina (Tina) Jalloh, and Brunilda Bonilla. Also honored but not pictured was the law firm of Reed Smith.

More than 300 guests were inspired at LSNJ's annual Equal Justice Awards Reception on June 2, where four new inductees of the Circle of Honor and others were celebrated for their commitment to equal justice for all. Special presentations were made to NJ State Senator Sandra B. Cunningham, NJ State Senator Declan J. O'Scanlon, Jr., Christopher J. Stracco, former chairperson of the IOLTA Fund of

the Bar of New Jersey, the Princeton Internships in Civic Service (PICS), and Suzanne M. McSorley, the PICS internship development chair.

Pro bono volunteers from around the state also were honored that evening for their service over the past year, providing numerous hours of free, legal services for destitute New Jerseyans. To learn more about pro bono opportunities with Legal Services, visit www.probononj.org.



The Circle of Honor, part of the New Jersey Equal Justice Library and Archive, heralds those who have made extraordinary achievements in advancing equal justice. The 2019 inductees were NJ Senate Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg, US Representative Bonnie Watson Coleman, the late Robert Del Tufo, former NJ Attorney General, and the late NJ Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz.

Melanie's Story



Melanie called the [LSNJLAWSM hotline](#) when her unemployment claim was denied. She lost a good-paying job and accepted a position at much lower pay with the understanding that a raise was imminent, as long as her performance met expectations. The employer then reneged on the salary increase, leaving Melanie in an impossible situation—unable to pay her bills, and un-able to collect unemployment. With the help of Legal Services, her claim was approved retroactively.

"With Sarah's help, I got my life back . . . I felt like I had no one to turn to. No one to help me. And she told me, 'Melanie, it's gonna be ok. I got this.'"

New laws, ever-changing policies, and precedent-setting decisions can affect our clients' lives in very real and significant ways. At Legal Services, we work to be a voice for our clients—influencing laws and policies before they are adopted and writing amicus briefs in cases that will have a major impact on low-income people. After new laws and policies are adopted or cases are decided, we immediately monitor the repercussions on our clients so that we can continue to advocate for their needs. Below are some examples of recent developments that are important to low-income people in New Jersey.



September 25, 2019—The New Jersey Office on Civil Rights held a forum on sexual harassment in employment and housing in New Jersey where LSNJ attorney Keith Talbot (pictured) provided testimony about sexual harassment in the workplace. The forum was co-sponsored by the NJOCR and the New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault. The information gathered will be used in a report about the scope of the problem and comprehensive policy recommendations to address it.

September 12, 2019—The U.S. Court of Appeals, Third Circuit, held in *Hackler v. Arianna Holdings Company, LLC*, that a NJ tax foreclosure can be avoided within 90 days if the tax certificate holder received more than it would have received in a chapter 7 bankruptcy case. Additionally, a tax foreclosure may be avoidable within two years as a fraudulent transfer because “reasonably equivalent value” for the property is not paid in the tax sale certificate bidding process whereby a homeowner’s other creditors are prejudiced. With this decision, a homeowner who lost equity as the result of a tax foreclosure may be able to undo the tax foreclosure in bankruptcy to save at least some of the equity, or possibly get the house back, if they file a bankruptcy petition in time.

August 9, 2019—Governor Murphy signed into law amendments to the New Jersey medical record copy law, which LSNJ helped propose and later advocated. The law will allow free

medical record copies for some people of limited means, and for requests by the not-for-profit companies and pro bono attorneys representing them. The law will go into effect March 1, 2020 and will allow Legal Services offices to get free medical record copies for their clients. Individuals meeting certain financial criteria (at or below 250% of the federal poverty level), or who receive state or federal assistance, are also eligible to directly request and receive a free copy of their records. [Senate, No. 984](#) is a preliminary copy of the text of the new law.

April 29, 2019—The New Jersey Supreme Court decided the consolidated cases of *Patricia McClain v. Board of Review, Department of Labor and Cynthia Blake v. Board of Review, Department of Labor*. 237 N.J. 445(2019). In this key decision, SJLS received a favorable decision on behalf of a claimant who had left a job for a new position, but the new job offer was subsequently rescinded.

April 25, 2019—Two key reforms of the state student loan program (NJCLASS) were codified in two bills: P.L.2019, c.62 (S3125) and P.L.2019, c.63 (S3149), resulting in two new income-sensitive payment programs and the opportunity for parties in default to erase the default by making affordable monthly payments. These changes represent a step in the right direction and are the result of concerted efforts begun in 2014 by LSNJ’s David McMillin along with borrowers and advocates.

LSNJ Offers New Podcast on Language Access

LSNJ explored a new medium for public education in 2019—[podcasts](#). We constantly strive to raise awareness of the issues impacting our client population and this previously untapped resource has proven to be an effective way to reach the general public. In the “State Agencies and Language Services” podcast, LSNJ’s Anisa Rahim, chief counsel of the Language Ac-

cess Rights Project, discusses the importance of language services in New Jersey state agencies, to ensure meaningful access to legal rights. She is joined by LSNJ’s director of Language Services Al Moreno, who provides insight on the importance of interpretation and translation services in a legal context, and related challenges faced by nonprofits.



Language Services



Anisa Rahim

Al Moreno

SPECIAL EVENTS

Celebrating Families

As part of the annual nationwide American Bar Association Family Reunification effort, Legal Services of New Jersey celebrated prevention and reunification success stories at its annual [Family Unification Day](#) on June 24, 2019 in New Brunswick.

The event brings together parents, children, caseworkers, attorneys, and judges to honor families

who have successfully reunified with their children after involvement with the NJ Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCPP) and those who have been able to remain together without removal.

Speakers at this year’s event included Essex County Superior Court Judges Sallyanne Floria and David B. Katz; Jerry Milner, Associate Commissioner of the federal Children’s Bureau; and the bureau’s special assistant David Kelly.

A new LSNJ video, “Caseworkers and Parents: Heroes Together Saving Families and Homes,” also debuted at the event and can be found on our website at www.lsnj.org/FamilyUnificationDay2019.aspx.



Jey Rajaraman, chief counsel of LSNJ’s Family Representation Project at left, and special speakers Milner and Kelly below.



STAFF STEPS UP

LSNJ Hosts Blood Drive

On September 25, LSNJ held its annual blood drive, collecting 21 pints from employees—the equivalent of 60 lives saved.

Families Love LSNJ’s School Supply Drive

LSNJ’s annual school supply drive for our clients was another a huge success! Through staff referrals and donations, we provided backpacks with supplies to families from Toms River to Phillipsburg!

Updated Domestic Violence Guide Now Available

This fall, LSNJ released the updated 2019 version of “Domestic Violence: A Guide to the Legal Rights of Domestic Violence Victims in New Jersey” in multiple languages. This [handbook](#) and other legal rights information is available at no cost on our website, www.lsnjlaw.org.



Using technological innovation and social media, LSNJ provides hundreds of thousands of people with access to legal information—people who otherwise might be unable to get the help they need. In 2018, our reach included:

- [LSNJLAWSM](#) – Legal information website garnered 555,790 visits.
- [Legal Rights Videos](#) – Series on taxes, expungement, and domestic violence had 83,203 views.
- [Clearing Your Record Online \(CYRO\)](#) – Interactive web program to help people expunge a record reported 8,325 completed eligibility interviews and 1,382 forms completed.

[www.LSNJ.org](#) – An organizational website where you can learn about the work of Legal Services statewide.

[www.LSNJLAW.org](#) – A legal information website to help you learn more about your civil legal rights in New Jersey and access materials to help you represent yourself pro se.

[www.PROBONONJ.org](#) – A site where attorneys can learn about and sign up for pro bono opportunities.

[www.NJEJLA.org](#) – The New Jersey Equal Justice Library and Archive is an educational resource that includes a history of Legal Services in New Jersey, interviews with current and former staff, and tributes to major contributors to social justice.

Moving from Poverty to Justice
A Quarterly Report from
Legal Services of New Jersey

To be added to the mailing list for this newsletter, email development@lsnj.org.



Campaign for Justice 2019

Look for the upcoming Campaign for Justice announcement and consider a donation to support justice and fairness in New Jersey.

This annual campaign raises funds for Legal Services of New Jersey and its five regional programs, which provide direct services to clients in all 21 counties through 23 local offices.

Your tax-deductible contribution helps us accept more cases and provide the legal expertise and the access to justice our clients deserve. You can donate at any time by visiting the Campaign for Justice website at www.lsnj.org/cfj.

PROBONONJ is a website and online resource

operated by Legal Services of New Jersey as a public service to expand and support pro bono civil legal assistance to disadvantaged New Jerseyans. The service links volunteers, agencies providing legal assistance, and ultimately clients themselves, offering coordination, support, resources, and other assistance.

PROBONONJ



The benefits to those you help are obvious, but the benefits you receive can be immeasurable.

New Attorneys

- Develop necessary practice skills
- Work directly with clients
- Gain access to materials and other information that make lawyering easier
- Make professional contacts

Experienced Attorneys

- Further develop your abilities
- Expand your practice into new areas
- Teach CLE courses
- Mentor newer practitioners

All Attorneys

- Enjoy the personal and professional satisfaction of helping someone who really needs it.
- Receive training that meets NJ CLE rule requirements
- Participate in practice-oriented forums
- Ease the burden on courts and administrative agencies
- Enhance the public perception of lawyers

To learn more, visit
www.probononj.org