

## UPLIFT—LSNJ's Newest Initiative



LSNJ staff and law clerks network at the first gathering of the Emerging Leaders for Justice Initiative

LSNJ launched United in the Pursuit of Leadership Initiatives for Tomorrow (UPLIFT) on July 22 with a roundtable event at the Stage House Tavern in Somerset. UPLIFT is part of the new Emerging Leaders for Justice Initiative (ELJI), which LSNJ created with a goal of identifying and inspiring future leaders in public interest and racial and social justice issues. The July event brought together LSNJ staff with current and former student interns for conversation and networking.

Staff responded to questions about their work and passions; students shared reflections about their internships and hopes for the future. One former intern

with LSNJ's Legal Assistance to Medical Patients (LAMP) project was inspired to go to medical school after seeing the connection between legal and medical assistance for low-income New Jerseyans (see the Winter 2021 issue of Poverty to Justice for an article about LAMP). Others, like Damon Davis, are interested in criminal justice reform and the ways legal support can help people not only after they have been incarcerated but before as well. "There'd be a whole lot of people not locked up if they knew there is help available," he observed. All offered insightful comments about the impact their internships have had on their professional development.



**Amanda Sautner,**  
LSNJ Law Clerk

*"I've seen first-hand the difference that people at LSNJ make every day in peoples' lives, and it's just so motivating for me. And I just want to spend the rest of my life doing the work that you guys do."*



**Damon Davis,**  
NNJLS Law Clerk

*"There'd be a whole lot of people not locked up if they knew there is help available."*



**Steven Mirsen,**  
LSNJ Law Clerk

*"It's been really great to have the responsibility entrusted in you to make positive outcomes for other people. Some of the research skills, memo writing, stuff like that, I was able to do in school. But when there's actually serious consequences riding on it—people trust you to find and secure a favorable outcome—it really does mean a lot."*

# Meeting the Needs of Our Communities



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

*“In spite of extreme challenges over the past year, we are proud to have implemented many new initiatives, both statewide and in each of our legal project areas.”*

In nearly every civil legal area—from housing to unemployment, taxes to domestic violence—the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the need for assistance; transformed court processes and procedures; and underscored and laid bare stark disproportionality, systemic inequities and structural racism that low-income and BIPOC communities experience daily. Already bearing the brunt of the pandemic, many of New Jersey’s most vulnerable residents were recently hit by yet another disaster: Hurricane Ida. As from the outset of the pandemic and in the wake of previous disasters, Legal Services of New Jersey stands ready to assist and innovate in our advocacy, outreach, and delivery of free civil legal services.

In a country where approximately one-quarter of adults do not have internet access, and millions more are under-connected or lack stable connectivity, the pandemic forced us to confront the disproportionate impact of the digital divide and accelerate the fight for equal access to justice in the digital age. Natural disasters like Ida require we confront moments of extreme urgency and despair. How

do we immediately meet the basic needs—food, clothing, shelter—of families and individuals who may have lost all their material possessions in a matter of hours? How do we rebuild homes, livelihoods, and communities?

In myriad ways, disasters challenge us to search for and create opportunities to think beyond current practices, imagine new models of care and support, and envision a future in which our communities’ needs—especially legal representation—are fully met. In spite of extreme challenges over the past year, we are proud to have implemented many new initiatives, both statewide and in each of our legal project areas. Several are highlighted in this newsletter, including the launch of the Melville “De” Miller, Jr. Justice Series; UPLIFT, part of our Emerging Leaders for Justice Initiative; new multi-lingual resources related to sexual and domestic violence and victims of crime assistance; and a statewide continuing legal education training program for pro bono attorneys who will assist clients with expungement petitions. Thank you, as always, for supporting this important and urgent work.

### John P. Kahn

Welcome to John P. Kahn, who joined the board of trustees for Legal Services of New Jersey in July. Kahn has been legal counsel to CVS Health/Aetna in Florham Park, NJ, since August 2020. There, he researches and analyzes health care laws and regulations, and provides legal support and regulatory guidance to internal business partners to facilitate the early resolution of litigation claims.

Kahn adds a unique perspective to the board from his prior roles as chair of the IOLTA Fund of the State of New Jersey, trustee of the New Jersey State Bar Association, and president of the Camden County Bar Association. Kahn sees his work at IOLTA as being a steward of the funds that will assist programs like Legal Services that provide needed legal assistance to the underprivileged. His time at the IOLTA Fund overlapped with former LSNJ President De Miller, whom he remembers as a “pioneer for social justice in New Jersey.” While a student at Rutgers School of Law, Camden, Kahn worked as an LSNJ law clerk—learning first-hand about

the work of Legal Services with the LSNJLAW<sup>SM</sup> Hotline, the SSI Project, and Health Care Access Project. His passion and commitment for Legal Services has now come full circle. “My interest in social justice and in joining the board, specifically, comes from that experience—meeting De and Dawn ... The cases that we worked on were interesting, and all the initiatives Legal Services was working on at the time. It was a great experience for me, just seeing the great work that Legal Services did then and does now.”

After graduating from Rutgers School of Law, Camden, in 2005, Kahn joined the firm of Archer and Greiner, but maintained an interest in the work of Legal Services, even assisting clients pro bono for LSNJ’s Foreclosure Defense Project.

When the opportunity presented itself to join the board of trustees, Kahn’s decision was easy. “The board is actually a who’s who of great legal minds in New Jersey. Being part of this group of New Jersey legal luminaries is both an honor and a privilege.”



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## Congratulations and Thank You to Volunteer Attorney John G. Holl

John G. Holl has been a volunteer attorney with the South Jersey Legal Services Private Attorney Involvement Program for over four years. Most recently, he



successfully expunged the record of a South Jersey man through the SJLS Expungement Project.

The expungement petition involved an issue regarding the interpretation of NJSA 2C:52-2(a). The statute provided that a petitioner convicted of multiple crimes, “all of which are listed in a single judgment of conviction,”

is eligible for expungement. The client had been convicted of two separate crimes, committed a few months apart. However, he was later re-sentenced for both crimes under a single judgment of conviction. The prosecutor’s office, in initially opposing the expungement, argued that the crimes had to be committed on the same day for 2C:52-2(a) to apply.

John argued that the statute contained no “same day” requirement and that the plain language of the statute should require that the expungement be granted. He also noted in his argument that the petitioner had completely turned his life around, has been crime-free for 16 years and had become a deacon and youth counselor. Also, the petitioner had been recognized by the same prosecutor’s office for his efforts in the Black community during Black History Month. The prosecutor withdrew his objections and the expungement was granted.

*“This work is particularly rewarding since you can see petitioners rebuilding their lives and, in many cases, they move on to help others. It’s particularly gratifying to use the legal system, that has often worked to our clients’ detriment in the past, to help restore them to fuller participation in civic life. The sincere thanks expressed by many of my clients makes me feel proud of our profession and my role in it.”*

John G. Holl

To learn more about the SJLS Expungement Project, contact Michelle T. Nuciglio, SJLS Director of Pro Bono Services, at 856-964-2010, ext. 6229 or at [MNuciglio@lsnj.org](mailto:MNuciglio@lsnj.org).

To learn more about other pro bono opportunities around the state, visit [www.probononj.org](http://www.probononj.org).

# Introducing the Melville “De” Miller, Jr. Justice Series

LSNJ has officially launched the Melville “De” Miller, Jr. Justice Series program. Named in honor of our co-founder and former president, the Justice Series 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. The first event, “Substance Use in the Child Welfare System,” was held on August 12; the second, “Reparations Now,” on September 13. Both virtual webinars are described below and can be viewed on *LSNJ’s YouTube channel*.

**“Substance Use in the Child Welfare System,”** held on August 12, 2021, was part of LSNJ’s Supporting and Preserving Families webinar series. Over 100 attorneys, judges, social workers, other child welfare professionals, and community members attended and heard from panelists Tricia Stephens, LCSW-R, Ph.D., Elizabeth Brico, and Alexandra Travis. Jey Rajaraman, Chief Counsel of LSNJ’s Family Representation Project (FRP), moderated the panel.

The webinar provided a context for the topic of substance use in the child welfare system, and highlighted the overrepresentation of Black children in the foster care system nationally and in New Jersey. Professor Stephens, Assistant Professor at Silberman School of Social Work, encouraged the audience to challenge the stigma



surrounding substance use in the child welfare system by adopting a humanistic perspective. She also discussed scientific research that demonstrates that substance use is not a predictor of child abuse or neglect. She called on the child welfare system to stop treating substance use as a reason for removal, and to support rather than punish parents who struggle with

substance use disorder.

Elizabeth Brico, freelance writer and journalist, and Alexandra Travis, parent ally for LSNJ’s FRP, shared personal stories to challenge the way the child welfare system vilifies substance use. The panelists called on the system to stop the use of drug tests, make timely referrals to evidence-based treatment programs, and, most importantly, to challenge the narrative that parents who use substances or suffer from substance use disorder are “bad parents.” With better support and access to treatment, the trauma of child removal could be prevented and cases involving substance use could have more favorable outcomes for children and families.

**“Reparations Now,”** held on September 13, 2021 and moderated by LSNJ Senior Vice President Akil Roper, explored the call for reparations in the context of historical, structural and systemic racism, and the war against poverty. Over 200 people attended the Zoom webinar.

Ryan P. Haygood, President and CEO of the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, discussed the urgent socioeconomic conditions

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# October Is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

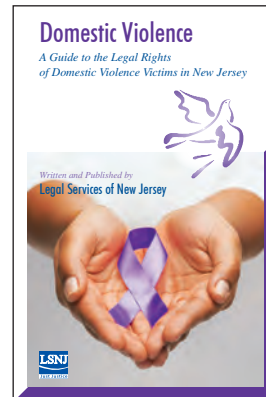
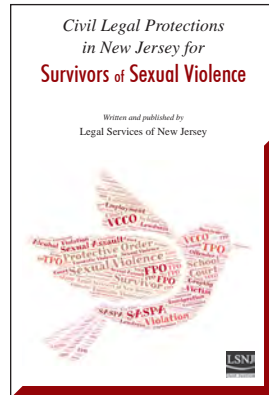
Each year, Legal Services participates in Domestic Violence Awareness Month by promoting legal rights content in *Looking Out For Your Legal Rights*, on our website, and on social media platforms. Thanks to a special grant from the New Jersey Department of Children and Families, LSNJ updated and created a range of materials this year, all free on our website.

## \*NEW—Victims of Crime Compensation Interactive Application

A new interactive web program, available in English and Spanish, helps users learn about, and apply for, financial assistance from the New Jersey Victims of Crime Compensation Office.

## \*NEW—Civil Legal Protections in New Jersey for Survivors of Sexual Violence

Covering topics such as sexual assault protective orders, preparing for court, employment and school protections, immigrant relief, and personal injury lawsuits, this new handbook describes the protections and benefits available to victims of sexual violence under New Jersey's civil law. The handbook is available in English and Spanish.



## Domestic Violence: A Guide to the Rights of Domestic Violence Victims in New Jersey

The first edition of this widely used handbook was published in 1986. In it, the major provisions of New Jersey law about domestic violence are explained, and suggestions for protecting oneself from abuse are provided. Updated versions were released in English and Spanish in 2019. Translations in Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Korean, and Arabic were completed in 2020.

## Your Legal Rights to Be Free from Dating Violence and Harassment

LSNJ created this short booklet in 2020 to help young people

identify when behavior crosses the line between an unhealthy relationship to illegal behavior, and what protections are available in dating relationships. It is available in English and Spanish.

## \*NEW—Sexual Assault Survivor Protection Act (SASPA) Video Series

Three videos are included in this new series: *Who Can Get a Protective Order?*; *How to Get a Temporary Protective Order*; and *How to Get a Final Protective Order*, with subtitles in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Haitian Creole. The videos are available on LSNJ's YouTube channel.

## Tribute to De Miller

*A Memorial Celebrating the Life and Legacy  
of Melville D. Miller, Jr.*

Wednesday, October 20, 2021  
10:00 to 12:00 noon

Patriots Theater at the War Memorial  
One Memorial Drive, Trenton, NJ

To RSVP and for information about complimentary parking and COVID-19 precautions at the Patriots Theater, or for instructions on viewing the livestream remotely, email Judy Long at [JLong@lsnj.org](mailto:JLong@lsnj.org).

## Congratulations to Jose Ortiz

Jose Ortiz of Essex-Newark Legal Services (ENLS) was recently awarded a New Jersey Legal Award of "Unsung Hero" at the New Jersey Law Journal's gala



on September 23, 2021.

Mr. Ortiz has been Deputy Director at ENLS since 2015 and has been partic-

ularly active in outreach efforts related to landlord-tenant law in the greater Newark area. You can see his oral history on the New Jersey Equal Justice Library and Archive website at [www.njejla.org/oralhistories/JoseOrtiz](http://www.njejla.org/oralhistories/JoseOrtiz).

## 2021 Campaign for Justice

In our 55th year, our annual campaign to raise funds for and awareness of the "justice gap" that affects low-income New Jersey residents will be starting soon, so look for our communications about this important cause. We hope you will invest in access to justice for all and donate to the 2021 campaign.



## Melville "De" Miller Justice, Jr. Series Continued from page 5

of Black people in New Jersey and the statewide efforts to create the New Jersey Reparations Task Force. Crystal Crawford, Executive Director of the Western Center on Law and Poverty, provided experiential information on the role of advocacy and background on the efforts that brought about positive change leading up to the first statewide reparations law in

California. Kamilah Moore, Chair of California's Reparations Task Force, described the ongoing work of California's Reparations Task Force and the path ahead. Kenya Tyson, Executive Director of The Black Massacre Project and Professor/Assistant Provost of Academic Affairs and University Curriculum of The New School, discussed reparations in the

context of atrocities such as the Black Wall Street massacre in Tulsa, Oklahoma and the strength and resilience of communities in the face of such attacks. The panelists raised awareness of the need for reparations and provided information about the current status in New Jersey and elsewhere across the nation.



[www.LSNJLAW.org](http://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.LSNJ.org](http://www.LSNJ.org) – An organizational website where you can learn about the work of Legal Services.

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

[www.NJEJLA.org](http://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.

## 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](mailto:development@lsnj.org).

**Poverty to Justice** quarterly newsletter includes updates on our work, our clients, and our volunteers as we move together toward the shared mission of justice.



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