

POVERTY^{to} JUSTICE



A Quarterly Report from Legal Services of New Jersey | Fall 2023

Over 300 Guests Gather for the 2023 Equal Justice Awards Reception



The Honorable Joseph H. Rodriguez and the Honorable Jaynee LaVecchia at the 2023 Equal Justice Awards reception.

October was National Pro Bono Month—a time in which we extend a heartfelt “thank you” to our dedicated pro bono volunteers for their time and effort spent helping to provide justice for many clients in need. In recognition of their work, LSNJ hosted the 2023 Equal Justice Awards reception on October 10 at the Palace at Somerset Park. This special annual event recognizes pro bono contributors across the state, celebrates those who have advanced equal justice for disadvantaged people, and memorializes progress toward justice for all in New Jersey.

LSNJ President Dawn K. Miller opened the program with an overview of the statewide Legal Services

system, sharing that the annual gathering has taken place for nearly 40 years, with the first in 1983. “We do this in order to honor the many volunteers who provided thousands of hours of free assistance to New Jerseyans who are unable to

afford a lawyer. We also recognize and celebrate those who have made valuable contributions to the mission of advancing justice for low-income people.”

Pre-recorded opening remarks were delivered by the Honorable Matthew J. Platkin, who was unable to attend. He said, “I apologize that I can’t be there in person, but it is nevertheless an honor and privilege to recognize the noteworthy contributions of each of you who carry out some of the most valuable and influential work in our state, collectively handling tens of thousands of cases each

year for our residents who are most in need. Year after year, for over 56 years, LSNJ has worked tirelessly to ensure access to justice and the availability of legal representation regardless of one’s ability to pay. That mission has and continues to prove vital to the rule of law and to the pursuit of justice.”

As the program transitioned into the pro bono award portion of the evening, LSNJ Board of Trustees Chair

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Former Governor Thomas H. Kean delivering remarks about NJEJLA Circle of Honor Inductees Michael R. Cole (posthumously) and the Honorable Joseph H. Rodriguez.

President's Message



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

This newsletter arrives on the heels of National Pro Bono Month and at the start of our Campaign for Justice, two annual occasions on which we recognize our collective impact in New Jersey and humbly request your continued investment in Legal Services' clients and mission.

At our recent Equal Justice Awards Reception, we celebrated the many contributions of law firms, legislators, advocates, medical providers, volunteer attorneys, community organizations, and supporters across the state in the ongoing effort to ensure justice for all New Jerseyans. To everyone honored—honored—including hundreds of volunteers; Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson and Senator Brian P. Stack; David A. Mebane, Esq., RWJBarnabas Health, and

LSNJ's Legal Assistance to Medical Patients (LAMP) program; and two stalwarts of justice, the Honorable Joseph H. Rodriguez and Michael R. Cole, Esq.—I thank you again for your service to low-income and vulnerable people. Thank you too to all those who attended and so generously sponsored the event—I hope you found the program as moving as I did. To those who could not attend, I encourage you to read more about this year's honorees in the pages that follow and to take a few minutes to watch three inspiring video tributes, celebrating the 15 year anniversary of LSNJ's LAMP project and our two 2023 NJEJA Circle of Honor inductees.

Year after year, this event serves as a powerful reminder that the quest for justice for all New Jerseyans requires effort from all of us.

While we continue to make progress, the unmet need for civil legal assistance and the number of fellow New Jerseyans living in poverty demand

our continued advocacy. I hope the tributes at our Equal Justice Awards reception and in this newsletter compel you to continue your support of New Jersey Legal Services. And, whether as a first—or next—step, we hope you will join us at our next Melville "De" Miller, Jr. Justice Series webinar, exploring issues of importance to the Latinx / Hispanic community, on Wednesday, December 13.



Top: Legal Services honors RWJBarnabas Health and David A. Mebane for their support of LAMP.

Bottom: LSNJ's Akil Roper with attendees from Verizon, a sponsor of the event.

Our Clients Speak

Legal Services helps client with guardianship and SSI



Marisol's daughter Natalie was diagnosed with autism when she was three and a half years old. The medical team at St. Joseph's Hospital connected Marisol with a support network of other parents of children with autism, who advised her to apply

for guardianship for Natalie. "They tell you, you know, 'think about what's going to happen when your child is 18. You no longer will have a voice.'" She looked around for a private attorney but quickly realized that was beyond their budget. Then St. Joseph's referred her to Legal Services.

"We just had to go to court for one day and that's it. And it was done."

Legal Services then assisted Natalie with an SSI disability claim. Marisol had applied on her behalf when she was younger and appealed on her own, to no avail.

With a Legal Services lawyer by

her side, Natalie's claim was finally approved. The small monthly SSI benefit will ensure a minimal income for Natalie throughout her life, and she will have access to healthcare coverage through SSI Medicaid when coverage through her parents' insurance ends.

"We are so thankful, my husband and I. ... Legal Services was the best thing that ever happened to me."

Watch Marisol's Our Clients Speak video at www.LSNJ.org/ClientsVideosStories.

Over 300 Guests Gather for the 2023 Equal Justice Awards Reception

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Cynthia M. Jacob, Esq., offered some inspirational words: "We are committed to honoring, supporting, and sustaining our volunteers who provide this pro bono service, and hope all of you honored this evening will continue to partner with our programs across the state, and perhaps also urge your colleagues to join you in this important work." Pro bono attorneys from across the state were honored and thanked for their commitment to seeking justice on behalf of low-income New Jersey-

ans. A full list of Major, Exceptional, and Significant contributors, as well as the hundreds of full representation pro bono volunteers is included in the program, which can be found at LSNJ.pub/2023EJAprogram.

The EJA Reception also celebrated the 15-year anniversary of LSNJ's Legal Assistance to Medical Patients (LAMP) program. Founded in 2008 as New Jersey's first medical-legal partnership, LAMP has since expanded across the state, providing legal

assistance to patients on a range of topics, such as guardianship, habitability, education, and public benefits. LAMP also trains medical providers to identify legal issues that patients commonly face, together working to address social determinants of health and improve clients'/patients' overall health and well-being.

David Mebane, executive vice president and general counsel at RWJBarnabas Health, was honored for his longstanding support of LAMP.

Dawn Miller expressed deep gratitude in her introduction of the award, sharing that LAMP wouldn't exist without David Mebane: "David was instrumental in selection and implementation of LAMP and, over the years, we have grown to rely on you, David, to speak on our behalf and to inform and put at ease other hospital general counsels." Mebane was joined on stage by Robert E. Margulies, a member of the RWJBarnabas board of trustees, who also accepted an award for the healthcare system. In his acceptance speech, Mebane recognized colleagues Darrell K. Terry and Ellen Cohen—two other key figures in LAMP's inception and continued success—and praised the efforts and talents of LAMP staff and attorneys. He went on to say, "[This work has] really improved me as a person and my understanding of the law and what the law can be. LAMP has truly made a difference to people's health and to their lives and is to really be appreciated."

Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson and New Jersey Sen-

ator Brian P. Stack (not in attendance) received the Lipman-Franks Award for their support of Legal Services' mission. In her acceptance speech, Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson emphasized learning from and motivating young people, saying, "I want to inspire you when you leave this room to think about young people and ask them, 'How are you going to make an impact on the next generation?' It is about us in this room spreading this energy that we have harnessed here out into the world."

Finally, two pillars of justice—Michael R. Cole, Esq. (posthumously) and the Honorable Joseph H. Rodriguez—were inducted into the New Jersey Equal Justice Library and Archive Circle of Honor. Former Governor Thomas H. Kean presented these



David A. Mebane, executive vice president and general counsel, RWJBarnabas Health, recipient of the William J. Brennan, Jr. Citation for Justice.

LSNJ's board of trustees. While he had vowed not to lobby his former colleagues after leaving public life, he broke his promise once—to urge them to introduce a bipartisan bill to fund Legal Services. Introducing Cole and referencing the divide in politics today, Kean said, "I think, if you look back to a person like Mike and try to see what he did in his bipartisan work and his work from the heart—somebody who cared so very much about the most important issues before the state and before its people—somehow we've got to take that as an example and get back to that kind of person."

Michael Cole's daughter, Elyse Cole, accepted the award on his behalf, saying, "The man that you worked with in more public spheres or professional spheres is who he was personally. He was the same man, even in his most private moments. As his daughter, he taught me by example to choose the right over the convenient, to always act with humility



Terence A. Russo, Lara Jean Ancona, and Andrew F. Blustein, of event sponsor Garfunkel Wild, P.C.

awards and offered introductory remarks.

Cole served as chief counsel to Governor Kean and later became chair and long-serving member of



Craig M. Gianetti and LSNJ Board Member Michael K. Furey, of event sponsor Day Pitney LLP.

and compassion towards others, and to be truthful in word, thought, and deed.”

The Honorable Joseph H. Rodriguez, United States District Judge for the District of New Jersey, was also inducted into the Circle of Honor. In addition to his leadership on the first board of Camden Legal Services and contributions to that organization’s success, he has been a central figure in Camden’s Cuban and Puerto Rican communities, a New Jersey Public Advocate, a critical player in the Mount Laurel case that opened the suburbs to affordable housing, and has held many other notable positions. In presenting his award, Governor Kean said, “We’ve had a lot of awardees over the years. Nobody has deserved it more than Joe Rodriguez.”

Accepting the award, Rodriguez shared a message of appreciation.

“There’s so many thanks that I can state from here, but as the evening developed, I realized that the most important thing I can do is to thank the committee that was so generous in nominating me for this award. And the other is to thank those who came and took the time to be here.” That list included not only family and lifelong friends, but members of the court, early staffers of the Camden County Legal Services program, and, of course,

Governor Kean, who both appointed Rodriguez to the position of NJ Public Advocate, and recommended him to then-president Reagan for nomination to the federal bench.

Harkening back to the early days of Camden Regional Legal Services, Rodriguez recognized early staffers, saying, “Going back to the history of Legal Services—the time when the water was not in a position to favor Legal Services, there were those who stood up and came forward and were willing to put their

names on the line to do what was important to aid the homeless. You saw them speak here tonight on the film, and they’re here tonight—Pete O’Connor and Carl Bisgaier.” He closed by recognizing Governor Kean, stating that he was proud to work with him, and observing that there was not one scandal during his term with Kean because of the governor’s leadership. “Members of the judiciary are not permitted, obviously, to be involved in politics. But there isn’t a day goes by when I take the bench that I don’t, in my heart, thank Tom Kean.”

In her closing remarks, Miller encouraged all to stay involved. “We’ve come a long way,” she said. “We have a long way to go, as well, to make sure that there’s access to lawyers for everyone, regardless of their ability to pay, but I hope tonight has inspired you all to continue walking the journey with us.”



The Honorable Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, New Jersey Assemblywoman and recipient of the Lipman-Franks Award, with LSNJ’s Claudine M. Langrin.

Pro Bono Updates



Carl Archer, Esq., Recognized as an Exceptional Contributor

Carl Archer, Esq., of Archer Law Office, LLC received Legal Services of New Jersey’s Exceptional Contributor Award at the 2023 EJA reception. Archer’s firm 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.

Archer 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. Archer advised and represented each and every client who needed assistance.

The Exceptional Contributor award was presented to one volun-

teer per region. Awardees include: Steven J. Sico, Esq. (CJLS), Mc-Carter & English, LLP with special recognition to Michelle Pallak, Esq. (ENLS), Mary Ellen Koscs-Fleming, Esq. (LSNWJ), William McInerney, Esq. (NNJLS), and Barbara J. Snaveley, Esq. (SJLS).

There are many ways to get involved with our pro bono efforts in New Jersey. Legal Services’ programs continually seek to partner with organizations and firms and can provide a tailored program to meet the needs of volunteers, including CLE training, pre-screening of clients, and ongoing mentorship and support. Visit PROBONONJ.org to explore the many opportunities to represent a client in a variety of civil



legal practice areas of your choosing, including bankruptcy, expungement, domestic violence, guardianships, tax, education, and many more.

SAVE THE DATE

Legal Services of New Jersey Presents a Melville “De” Miller, Jr. Justice Series Event

Issues Impacting the Latinx/Hispanic Community in New Jersey – Wednesday, December 13 12:00 p.m. EST

Join Legal Services of New Jersey for a panel discussion among legal experts, professionals, and community leaders in the state on issues of importance to the Latinx/Hispanic community.



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This event is proudly sponsored by Verizon.



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John P. Kahn, Esq.

Dawn K. Miller, Esq.



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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 – An organizational website where you can learn about the work of Legal Services.

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.

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.

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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