

New Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Initiative Provides Needed Legal Assistance

We are pleased to announce our newest statewide project that partners with New Jersey Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) providers, peer recovery programs, and healthcare institutions to provide needed legal assistance to this population.

Through this statewide initiative, providers may make direct referrals to SUD so advocates can help with destabilizing legal issues, such as housing disputes, public entitlements, family law matters, and debt collection, that too often derail recovery and community reintegration. Clients can also apply directly through the LSNJLAWSM Statewide Hotline.

Legal Services providers are uniquely positioned to provide these needed services and recently received special training on New Jersey's Recovery Court process.

Recovery Court is a specialized term of probation offered as an alter-



The SUD project is made possible through funding from the State of New Jersey Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) and the New Jersey State portion of Opioid Settlement funds.

native to prison for people who have been charged with a crime and struggle with alcohol or drug dependency. Developed to help people with substance use issues break the cycle of involvement in the legal system, Recovery Court is an intensive probation program focused on treatment. By understanding how this program works, we will be better able to advise and represent our clients' interests.

Visit our website for more information on this and other programs, at www.lsnj.org.

"With this new initiative, as with all of Legal Services' representation projects, we strive to provide assistance that not only helps resolve the current issue, but has a longer-term impact that improves the life of the client."

*- Linda Babecki, Esq.
Chief Attorney, LSNJ SUD Project*

President's Message



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

This edition of Poverty to Justice highlights Legal Services' multifaceted work and mission,

- Providing direct, transformational assistance to clients in need, as in the story of Darius and his wife;
- Extending mentorship and public interest career pathways to students, as we welcomed dozens of interns and fellows across the state this summer;
- Connecting legal experts with Legal Services' clients in need of assistance and celebrating dedicated pro bono volunteers such as Ken Coughlin;
- Publishing a wealth of free

community legal and know-your-rights content, including resources for victims and survivors of domestic and dating violence; and

- Bringing the community together to raise awareness and inspire advocacy around pressing issues impacting low-income New Jerseyans, as at our Expungement Seminar in September.

In December, we will commemorate sixty years of this multifaceted work, including many milestone court cases and major advocacy developments along the way. We hope you will join us—members of the judiciary, leaders in the legal profession, corporate partners, philanthropic champions, and members of the Legal Services community—on the evening of Wednesday, December 9 to celebrate six decades of advancing equal justice throughout New Jersey. We invite individuals and groups, including firms or businesses, to [register to attend](#) and would be honored to explore [sponsorship opportunities](#) of this landmark event.

Unfortunately, even as we recognize these accomplishments, we face serious challenges, including attacks on and cuts to longstanding funding sources. It is in this context that we

call on our greater community for support—as attendees or sponsors of our 60th anniversary, as pro bono volunteers, and as contributors to our upcoming Campaign for Justice, launching this fall.

Your investment in Legal Services is both transformative and economical. Indeed, LSNJ's Poverty Research Institute (PRI) just released its latest report, [“The Economic Impact of Legal Representation in Eviction Cases in New Jersey.”](#) detailing not only the significant financial return on investment of Legal Services' eviction prevention work, but also the profound, often life-changing impact of Legal Services on individuals, families, and communities facing eviction across the state. Outside of eviction prevention work, the national Legal Services Corporation finds that civil legal aid—across legal areas—yields a \$7 return on every \$1 invested.¹

Thank you, as always, for your commitment to advancing equal justice here in New Jersey.

¹ www.lsc.gov/press-release/civil-legal-aid-yields-7-return-every-1-invested-lsc-economic-brief-shows

Creditor Violations Result in Big Reward for Foreclosure Client



Darius (not his real name) contacted LSNJ when he was in tax foreclosure for tax arrears. At age 70, he was at risk of losing his home of 20 years and the equity in it. "I was definitely worried," he says, "because no one wants to lose their house or move out and find someplace to live."

Darius and his wife are retired—him from a security guard position; her from a major airline company—living on a fixed income. "We're not rich, we're not poor. We're just making it." When his wife stopped working, and before her Social Security payments began, they fell behind on their property taxes. The best available option

was to file a Chapter 13 bankruptcy to repay the arrears over five years, which they did with the help of Legal Services. And they were successfully making payments until one of the creditors directly violated the court's bankruptcy orders. First, the creditor paid off the tax arrears without the court's permission—then they sent collection letters to Darius threatening foreclosure if he didn't reimburse them the \$23,000 lump sum that they paid.

LSNJ's Foreclosure Defense Project filed a motion against the creditor for these violations and, after a hearing, the court Ordered that the creditor was not allowed to recov-

"He was thorough. He kept me posted on everything. ... I would recommend you guys to anyone that's in that situation."

er the \$23,000 from debtor due to their violations of the court order. The resulting net financial benefit enabled Darius and his wife to end the bankruptcy early and lower the outstanding principal on their home. He says his experience with his attorney was excellent.

LSNJ Hosts New Jersey Expungement Summit



Left to right: NJ Public Defender Jennifer N. Sellitti; LSNJ Executive President Claudine Langrin, President Dawn Miller, Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, Assemblywoman Annette Quijano, and LSNJ Senior Vice President Akil Roper

"Reform doesn't happen on its own. There is a community of advocates throughout the state who have all in some way contributed to the advance of expungements through policy, legislation, litigation, advocacy, community education, and direct services. We all can play a part."

- Akil Roper, Esq.

LSNJ Senior Vice President and Chief Counsel of Reentry

On September 18, LSNJ hosted the New Jersey Expungement Summit, aimed at raising awareness, garnering support for legislative and policy changes, and promoting pro bono volunteerism in this important legal area. Attendees learned from experienced practitioners about eligibility, gathering records, and filing petitions for expungement cases. The event was organized by LSNJ in partnership with Rutgers Camden and the New Jersey Office of the Public Defender.

The program opened with remarks from LSNJ President Dawn Miller and the Public Defender for the State of New Jersey Jennifer Sellitti. Assemblywomen Quijano and Reynolds-Jackson and accepted special recog-

nitions from the program's sponsors for their leadership in advancing expungement reform and gave inspiring remarks to the attendees. Other speakers included Legal Services staff Diana Cardenas, Esq., CJLS; Aili Monahan, Esq., NNJLS; Michelle T. Nuciglio, Esq., SJLS; Akil Roper, Esq., LSNJ; and Rosalyn Scriven, Esq., LSNJ; Office of the Public Defender staff Michele E. Friedman, Stephen Hunter, Esq., Jennifer N. Sellitti, Esq., and Kimberly Schultz, Esq.; Rutgers University Camden: Meredith Schalick, Esq. and Viktoria Zerda, Esq.; and attorneys Danielle Hughes, Esq., Hall Booth Smith P.C.; Michael Noveck, Esq., FBT Gibbons P.C., Alexander Shalom, Esq., Lowenstein Sandler.



Farewell and Many Thanks to Pro Bono Volunteer Ken Coughlin

It is with deep appreciation and respect that we bid farewell to Kenneth F. Coughlin, Esq., retired Senior Vice President of Law, Sony Electronics, and longtime pro bono volunteer with the LSNJLAWSM Hotline. Coughlin began working with LSNJ while with the firm Sills Cummis & Gross P.C. in 2008 and has focused primarily on bankruptcy cases. "For someone who is just starting the practice of law—quite frankly, in terms of skills development—there can be nothing better than this," he says. A video about his life and work can be viewed at lsnj.pub/probono-coughlin.



LSNJ Senior Vice President Akil Roper, President Dawn Miller, Pro Bono Volunteer Ken Coughlin, and LSNJLAWSM Hotline Supervisor Stephanie Setzer

New Jersey Legal Services

commemorates

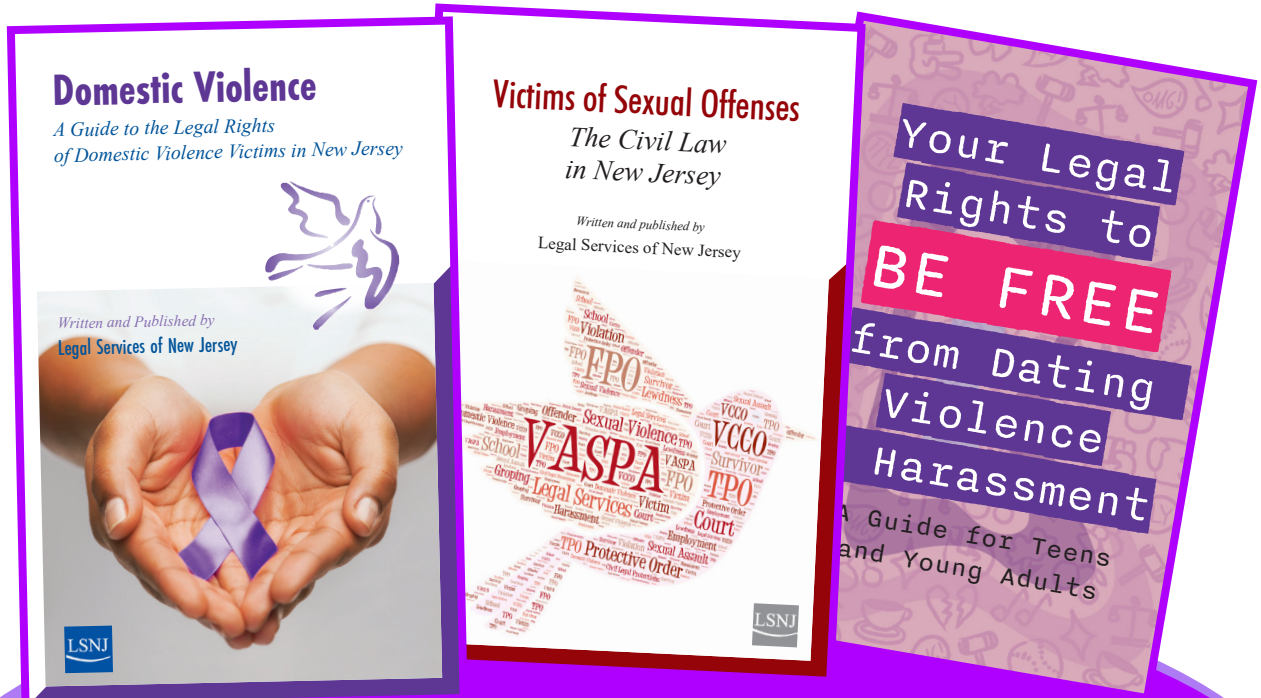
60 years

Wednesday, December 9

*The Palace at
Somerset Park*

Visit our website for more
details and sponsorship
opportunities.

LSNJ Recently Updated Its Collection of Resources for Survivors



Domestic Violence: A Guide to the Legal Rights of Domestic Violence Victims in New Jersey—lsnj.pub/DVhandbook

Victims of Sexual Offenses: The Civil Law in New Jersey—lsnj.pub/VASPA-manual

Your Legal Rights to BE FREE from Dating Violence and Harassment—lsnj.pub/DatingViolence

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. If you or someone you love has been a victim of intimate partner violence, you are not alone and help is available. LSNJ's Domestic Violence Representation Project (DVRP) provides advice to low-income New Jerseyans who suffer from abuse. Representation may be offered in family court cases where a victim

is seeking a restraining or protective order. Says one recent DVRP client, "I was thinking it's good for my kids to be around their dad, so I was trying to just deal with it. But when I figured out that, 'no, this is affecting my kids more than it's affecting me, it didn't take me long before I decided the best thing for us was to leave that situation."

About her Legal Services attorney, she says, "Once she took my case, I felt like I had like a whole group of people taking care of me, you know? I was really in need of that feeling, that I have somebody by my side and helping me and guiding me. ... And I had no doubt that we would be getting the restraining order because of how good she was."

Thank You Summer Interns!



LSNJ is pleased to have had another exceptional cohort of interns this summer that included both law students and undergraduate students. Students with a shared commitment to helping the disadvantaged practiced for 8 weeks across a wide array of legal areas and under the supervision of Legal Services staff and attorneys. Over the course of their internship, many fellows remarked that they enjoyed being placed in an environment where they could learn hands-on from public interest lawyers and witness the impact of their work. We wish them the best in their careers, optimistic that they will continue to make positive change for low-income communities.

"One thing I really appreciated about this was the opportunity to be able to dip my toes into a lot of different parts of the legal field. I think many [students] who are interested in law...might not really get that exposure to the different civil issues people may have."

- LSNJLAWSM Hotline Intake Intern

"From my very first day, the staff attorney took me up under his wing... I was able to sit in court with him as a second chair and we were able to get a final restraining order for a client."

- Poritz Fellow, South Jersey Legal Services



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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Cy pres awards from class action settlements provide significant support for our work. Checks should be made payable to **"Legal Services of New Jersey."** For more information, email eshulman@lsnj.org.

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