

POVERTY¹⁰ JUSTICE



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

Third Annual United in the Pursuit of Leadership Initiatives for Tomorrow (UPLIFT) Gathering Draws Its Largest Crowd Yet



Forty guests attended the third annual summer UPLIFT event, held in July at the Stage House Tavern in Somerset. This special gathering provides a unique networking opportunity for summer interns and new attorneys to learn from experienced attorneys from across the state, with panel participants fielding questions about professional development and substantive legal areas, such as disability, unemployment, and housing.

As guests passed the microphone to share a bit about themselves, the diversity of experience was striking even among the practicing attorneys. Some had left private practice to follow a passion for public interest; others had prior careers in mental health and teaching. All have found what they were searching for at Legal Services—the opportunity to make a real and lasting difference in peoples’ lives.



Continued on page 7

President's Message



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

This edition of Poverty to Justice arrives on the heels of Juneteenth, LGBTQ+ Pride Month, and several U.S. Supreme Court decisions that threaten the rights, opportunities, and protections of BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and low- and middle-income Americans.

In a pair of recent decisions—and what Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson aptly decries as “a tragedy for us all”—a conservative majority on the Supreme Court gutted affirmative action and dismantled race-conscious college admission policies. This reversal of over 40 years of precedent ignores the legacy of slavery and the enduring realities of racism and injustice in this country. A day later, the same majority overruled the current administration’s plan to elimi-

nate \$400+ billion in student debt, a decision that will disproportionately harm low-income and Black and Latinx borrowers. The same day, this majority also ruled that a Colorado web designer has a First Amendment right to refuse to create wedding sites for a same-sex couple, despite a state law banning discrimination against gay people.

In New Jersey, we celebrate recent efforts to protect the LGBTQ+ community, including an executive order making the state a safe haven for gender-affirming healthcare; the creation of a [one-stop information hub](#) for transgender and non-binary New Jerseyans; and the protections of the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination, one of the most extensive in the country. We also proudly continue our Melville “De” Miller, Jr. Justice Series, free public programming examining important social, legal, and economic justice issues. We invite you to view webinars exploring [Reparations, Discrimination and Bias](#), [Environmental Justice](#), and, most recently, issues impacting [the AAPI community](#).

As Justice Jackson reminds us in her dissent in *Students for Fair Admissions v. University of North Carolina*, “deeming race irrelevant in law does not make it so in life.” This especially rings true in our home state of New Jersey, one of the wealthiest and most

diverse states in the country where, despite these recent changes in the law, shameful racial disparities between Black and Latinx New Jerseyans and their white neighbors persist—in health, wealth, and countless other categories of well-being. In fact, New Jersey has one of the highest racial wealth gaps in the country—almost twice that of the national racial wealth gap—and the state’s public school system is ranked among the most segregated in the country.

In the wake of attempts to set back progress, abolish rights, and undo protections for marginalized Americans, we must imagine and implement even more urgent and transformational change. The New Jersey Legal Services system remains steadfast in our commitment to justice for all and will continue, as we have for more than 56 years, to celebrate our state’s diversity, oppose discrimination in all forms, and advocate for justice for all disadvantaged, oppressed, and vulnerable people. Thank you for joining us in this shared work.

Read more about the wealth gap: [LSNJ.pub/TwoNJs](https://lsnj.pub/TwoNJs)

Read more about school segregation in NJ: NJspotlightnews.org/special-report/segregatednj

A Melville "De" Miller, Jr. Justice Series Event

LSNJ Presents "AAPI in New Jersey: Representation, Discrimination, and Other Critical Issues Facing the Community" Webinar, Sponsored by Verizon, Inc.

On May 31, LSNJ presented a webinar on discrimination and other issues impacting the Asian American and Pacific Islander community as part of its ongoing Melville "De" Miller, Jr. Justice Series, intended to raise awareness of important social, legal, and economic justice issues. The webinar was sponsored by Verizon, Inc.

The panel was moderated by LSNJ board member and partner at Pashman Stein Walder Hayden P.C. Jhanice V. Domingo, Esq. and featured Rose Cuison-Villazor, Interim Dean and Professor of Law at Rutgers Law School; Fannie Chan Jarvis, Community Relations Specialist and AAPI Liaison at the New Jersey Division



on Civil Rights; Dr. Ying Lu, Associate Professor at NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development and co-founder of E Pluribus Unum Project; and Maria Vallejo, Esq., partner at Chasan, Lamparello, Mallon and Cappuzzo. Almost 900 people were in attendance for the Zoom webinar.

The panelists, all experts in their

opening remarks, LSNJ Senior Vice President Akil Roper, Esq. reminded the audience that, "we must remain present and intentional."

Moderator Domingo provided context for the AAPI discussion, noting recent publicized attacks on people in the AAPI community. She then posed a series of questions to each of the panelists. Dean Cuison-Villazor discussed AAPI history and recent scholarship and provided insight on the connection between AAPI discrimination, the "model minority myth," and critical race theory. She explained the origins of exclusionary immigration and alien land laws and their lasting impacts. Chan Jarvis discussed the role of the Division on Civil Rights in connection to enforcement of anti-discrimination laws including New Jersey's Law Against Discrimination and the Fair Chance in Housing Act. She stressed the importance of com-



respective fields, shared their wealth of knowledge and provided important and unique perspectives on the many facets of bias and discrimination in the AAPI community. In

Continued on next page

Legal Services Helps Client Fend Off Eviction

Maria's landlord did not appreciate her persistent requests for the repairs her apartment desperately

needed. When her family's income declined during the pandemic and they fell behind on rent, he was quick

threats of changing the locks. Although she had secured rental assistance, he tried to claim that he was not receiving the payments and again tried to evict her.



to take the opportunity to try to evict them. He harassed her with middle-of-the-night texts and

Watch other client videos on our website at LSNJ.org/ClientsVideosStories.

New Jersey Is a Safe Haven for Gender-Affirming Care

Pride Month is a time to celebrate, honor, and support the LGBTQ+ community. This June, new efforts to protect the LGBTQ+ community were introduced here in New Jersey. Executive Order No. 326, signed by Governor Phil Murphy on April 4, made New Jersey a safe place for anyone who seeks or provides gender-affirming healthcare. In order to get the word out about these new protections, a new article, "New Jersey is a safe haven for gender-affirming healthcare," was added to our website, LSNJLAW.org.

Continued from previous page

munity partnership and support. Dr. Lu discussed efforts to require AAPI history and culture to be taught in public schools; the connection to African-American history; and the importance of representation in education. Vallejo discussed the importance of representation at various levels of organizations, particularly law firms.

This webinar was part of the Melville "De" Miller, Jr. Justice Series, named in honor of LSNJ's co-founder and former president. These free events are open to the public and intended to raise awareness of important social, legal, and economic justice issues. They 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 opinions and ideas expressed by the invited speakers, panelists, and community members are broadcast to inform and educate, to expand thought and stimulate discussion, and may not necessarily represent the position or views of LSNJ. Nothing contained herein is it meant by LSNJ to attempt to influence government decision-making, enacting, changing, or removing legislation, rules, or other covered government actions, nor is it meant to encourage others to contact government officials with that position.

To view this webinar, or to learn more about previous or upcoming Justice Series events, visit LSNJ.org/JusticeSeries.

Family Unification Day

2023 Annual Unification Day Celebrates Two Successfully Reunited Fathers



LSNJ’s Parent Ally, Iesha Hammons; Unification Day Honoree, Ramee; and LSNJ Chief Attorney, Family Stability and Preservation Project, Sylvia L. Thomas, Esq.

As part of the annual nationwide American Bar Association Family Reunification effort, LSNJ hosted its 2023 Family Unification Day on Friday, June 23, at the New Jersey Law Center in New Brunswick. The event honors families who have successfully prevented removal or been reunified with their children after involvement with the New Jersey Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCPP)

and the “heroes” who helped them achieve their goals.

In a nod to this year’s theme, keynote speaker, The Honorable Lisa James-Beavers, Superior Court of New Jersey, Family Division, Burlington County Vicinage, set the tone with a narration of Robert Hayden’s poem, “Those Winter Sundays.” She humanized the important role of fathers and centered her speech around celebrat-

ing fathers and reimagining how we can assist them in the child welfare system.

This year’s video, “Fighting to Father—Recognizing the Important Role of Fathers in the Child Welfare System,” highlighted the experiences and unique challenges of two 2023 Unification Day Honorees, fathers Morris and Ramee. The event concluded with an award ceremony and speeches from the honorees and their heroes.

Their stories were shared with a room full of attorneys, caseworkers, judges, honorees, heroes, and many other important players in the child welfare system and they were praised for their efforts to reunite with their children.

Congratulations to all the honorees, who have successfully remained united or have been reunited with their children, and to the heroes who made such a difference in their lives.



Pro Bono Updates



LSNJ's Pro Bono Initiative Recruits New Volunteers at Statewide Events

BANKRUPTCY BENCH BAR CONFERENCE

On Thursday, May 11, and Friday, May 12, Janet Ashley-Naouli, administrator of LSNJ's Pro Bono Initiative (PBI), attended the William H. Gindin Bankruptcy Bench Bar Conference held at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City. The annual conference provides an opportunity to personally greet and thank our current pro bono attorneys and engage new attorneys who may be interested in volunteering with PBI. Many conference participants stopped by the table to offer support of Legal Services' good work, with several judges expressing an interest in pursuing pro bono opportunities upon their upcoming retirements from the bench.

NJSBA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Janet Ashley-Naouli, PBI administrator, and Akil Roper, Esq., LSNJ senior vice president and PBI supervising attorney, attended the New Jersey State Bar Annual Meeting and Convention, which took place Wednesday, May 17 through Friday, May 19 at the Borgata in Atlantic City. Many of those in attendance visited LSNJ's table to learn more about pro bono opportunities.

Top: LSNJ's Janet Ashley-Naouli (center) with Roshni Shah and Carlos Martinez of Scura, Wigfield, Heyer, Stevens & Cammarota, LLP
Middle: Akil Roper, Esq. with Bill Matsikoudis of Matsikoudis & Fanciullo, LLC
Bottom: LSNJ's Akil Roper, Esq. with LSNJ Chief Counsel, Taxes, Marcia Suarez, Esq. and The Honorable Mala Sundar, NJ Tax Court



Save the Date LSNJ Equal Justice Awards Reception



Tuesday, October 10, 2023
The Palace at Somerset Park
333 Davidson Avenue
Somerset, NJ 08873



5:30 - Cocktails and Buffet
7:00 - Awards Program

Learn more at www.LSNJ.org/EJA.

Legal Services in New Jersey Recognizes, Respects, and Continues the Juneteenth Mission

On June 19, 1865, Union General Gordon Granger traveled to Galveston, Texas to inform the state's people of the Emancipation Proclamation of two years earlier, declaring freedom for all formerly enslaved people in the Confederacy. Almost 150 years later, in 2020, Governor Murphy signed legislation designating "Juneteenth" as a state and public holiday in New Jersey. As a now well-established holiday in our state and nationwide, we celebrate our progress, but also are reminded that the struggle towards equality and equity must continue at all costs. In honor of Juneteenth, Legal Services continues its commitment to progress and encourages others to join efforts to advance justice.

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Continued from page 1



Jade Jang and Yahya Habib are undergraduate interns from the Princeton Internships in Civic Service (PICS) program working in the LSNJ office.

"It's such a complicated [legal] system that not a lot of people know how to navigate. Being able to work at the LSNJ office has been such an amazing experience." - Jade

"Growing up, I never knew what specifically I wanted to do in the legal field and I think my internship here and the time I spent here really solidified my path." - Yahya

Stephen Northington, Deborah T. Poritz Fellow working with Legal Services of Northwest Jersey (LSNWJ) is a rising 3L at Rutgers Law Newark. He says, *"What I was learning in school, just about how the law has been used against people, made me realize that I need to use my privilege as an upcoming lawyer to fight those unjust laws. And this summer with Legal Services has just been amazing and definitely solidified my desire to be with an organization like this."*



Mary Saldanha has been with Northeast New Jersey Legal Services (NNJLS) for two years. She says, *"The main reason why I chose public interest is based on my experience as a school teacher in Kissimmee, Florida. I worked with a lot of disadvantaged students and it's where I developed a heart for people who just are downtrodden in life. And I'm really grateful to be here."*



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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.

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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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