

13th Annual Family Unification Day Promotes Equitable Outcomes in Child Support



Left: LSNJ's Sylvia L. Thomas shares opening remarks at Unification Day

Right: The Honorable Rodney Cunningham provides the keynote speech at Unification Day.

As part of the annual nationwide American Bar Association family reunification effort, Legal Services of New Jersey hosted its 2024 Family Unification Day celebration on Monday, June 17, at the New Jersey Law Center in New Brunswick. The event provides an opportunity to lift up families who have been successful within the child welfare system while also honoring heroes that may have been pivotal in the family's success.

The focus this year was on the national and local efforts to end the practice of the State's collection of child support from parents engaged in

litigation with the child welfare system. Federal law requires that states issue orders to Title IV-E families in an effort to offset the cost of their foster care. Says Sylvia L. Thomas, Chief Counsel of LSNJ's Family Stability and Preservation Project, "Because of the federal requirement and the fact that most parents whose children are placed in foster care are struggling financially, fees fall heavily on families with very low incomes." Research shows that requiring families to reimburse the state and federal governments for the costs of foster care services does not benefit anyone. As such, LSNJ supports the

passage of New Jersey's Senate Bill S4248, "Equitable Outcomes in Child Support Collection Act," sponsored by Senator M. Teresa Ruiz, which will effectively end the practice of charging poor parents for foster care in New Jersey.

The Honorable Rodney Thompson, presiding judge of the Mercer County Family Part provided introductory remarks for the keynote speaker, the Honorable Rodney Cunningham. Cunningham spoke about the importance of family and the strength and determination of families to remain

President's Message



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

This summer, I want to express my deepest gratitude to our 2024 class of interns, fellows, law students, and volunteers. Year after year, students make an incredible direct impact here at LSNJ and across the state—authoring publications, conducting client intakes, participating in outreach events, producing excellent legal research and writing, and assisting clients. Our interns make an incredible impact on our collective morale—asking insightful questions, sharing new ideas and perspectives, continuing to inspire longtime staff, and invigorating our commitment to the urgent mission of justice for all New Jerseyans.

Legal Services' intern and fellowship program has a long, storied history. For decades, it has served as a powerful vehicle to introduce under-

graduate and law students to the impact and possibility of careers in the public interest. Indeed, dozens of interns and fellows have

returned to build careers within New Jersey's Legal Services system—as second-year interns, staff attorneys across the state, and supervisors and leaders of advocacy units. Even an LSNJ vice president and a director of one of our regional programs

began their relationship with Legal Services as a student intern.

Now in its 35th year, the Deborah T. Poritz Public Interest Fellowship Program—named in honor of New Jersey Supreme Court Chief Justice and former LSNJ Board Chair Deborah T. Poritz—has been funded in major part by the IOLTA Fund of the Bar of New Jersey. The program sponsors public interest legal fellowships across the state—at Legal Services of New Jersey, the five New Jersey Legal Services regional programs, and other legal services programs.

Since 2011, LSNJ has also hosted two summer interns from Princeton University through the Princeton University Internships in Civic Service (PICS) program. Shaina Watrous, LSNJ's first PICS intern, was awarded

"Whatever you choose to do, leave tracks. That means don't just do it for yourself. You will want to leave the world a little better for your having lived."

- Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg

an Equal Justice Medal at the 2019 LSNJ Equal Justice Awards Reception and was later recognized by the PICS program on the occasion of their 25th anniversary. Now a public defender, Watrous cites her summer internship as a formative "first exposure to poverty law," which inspired her to pursue a career in public service.

In 2021, LSNJ announced the Emerging Leaders for Justice Initiative (ELJI) and the inaugural UPLIFT (United in the Pursuit of Leaders for Tomorrow) program, bringing together current and former interns, young attorneys, and more senior staff in conversation and community. We hope these new initiatives will foster a strong alumni community among our interns, fellows, and volunteers, and inspire this community to stay in public interest careers for the long term.

Thank you again to our 2024 interns, fellows, and volunteers—for helping us "leave tracks," and, together, "leave the world a little better." We wish you all well in your journey and look forward to crossing paths again!

Thank you to our summer interns!

LSNJ would like to thank summer undergraduate interns from American, Elon, Emory, George Washington, Princeton, and Rutgers Universities: Annie Akbar, Riya Bhalla, Duncan Campbell, Ananya Dondapati, Doris Lee, Alexa Mark, Fatima Mirza, Eniy Salib, Aaron Santos Buchanan, Shams Sayed, and Gonzalo Sevillano; and law school interns Christine Anabo and Ben Goodman. Student interns spend the summer working with the LSNJ Legal Assistance to Medical Patients (LAMP) project, the LSNJLAWSM Hotline, and regional Legal Services programs.

Law school intern Christine Anabo grew up in the Philippines surrounded by poverty, where she says food insecurity, homelessness, and a severe shortage of proper medical care weighed her community down. She says,

“When I received the opportunity to study abroad and attend law school, I vowed to devote my education to those in need. I believe those of us trained in the law have a duty to promote justice for all, particularly for the most vulnerable among us.”

During her time at LSNJ, Christine has helped draft a brief on an eviction matter, assisted with the Family Unification Day celebration, and written an article for statewide publication.

“I will take everything I have learned here at LSNJ with me as I return to law school and continue to fight poverty through law after graduation.”



Paul R. Marino, Esq. Day Pitney LLP

I'm inspired by the reactions I get from pro bono clients with whom I work and the knowledge that our work is making a difference for the client. Access to justice should not depend on financial resources.

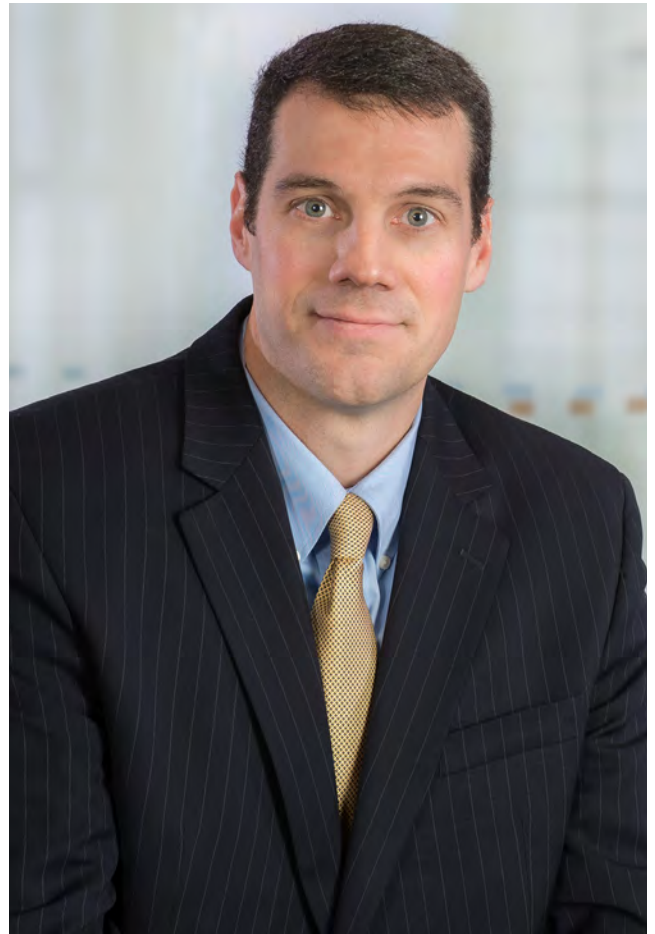
- Paul R. Marino, Esq.

Welcome to experienced litigator, Paul Marino, who joined the LSNJ Board of Trustees in June! At Day Pitney LLP, Marino assists corporate clients with complex commercial disputes, provides counsel on and litigates shareholder and consumer class actions, and represents individuals and corporate fiduciaries in contested trust, estate, and guardianship matters. In addition, he defends lawyers and law firms against malpractice and related claims in state and federal courts. Marino is the managing partner of the firm's New Jersey office and the former chair of the Federal Practice and Procedure Section of the New Jersey State Bar Association.

Marino has shown a strong

commitment to pro bono work. He is the former chair of Day Pitney's Pro Bono Committee and captain of its pro bono program, serving as court-appointed

attorneys for allegedly incapacitated persons in guardianship proceedings in New Jersey. He has participated extensively in the Bet Tzedek Project, which assists Holocaust survivors with applications for reparations from the German Government. In recognition of his efforts, he was the recipient of the New Jersey State Bar Association's Pro Bono Award for 2013.



Joining the LSNJ Board of Trustees is a fantastic opportunity to collaborate with some of the best and brightest minds in the legal community. I'm motivated by the chance to work alongside passionate professionals dedicated to making a tangible difference in the lives of those who need it most.

- Paul R. Marino, Esq.

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motivated to overcome their circumstances; and emphasized that the role of judges and stakeholders is not only to keep children safe, but also to show empathy for the families served.

A video titled “The Price of Reunification: Foster Care Child Support” was showcased, highlighting two families who became indebted to the child support program and expert opinions from Mary McManus-Smith, LSNJ Chief Counsel for Family Law, and Maria Cancian, Ph.D., Dean, McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University. The video, along with a highlight reel of the event, the keynote speech of the Honorable Rodney Cunningham, Presiding Judge, Family Part, Atlantic and Cape May Counties, and speeches and videos from prior years, can be viewed on LSNJ’s website and YouTube channel.



Sabrina (not her real name) experienced a tragic situation that left her without a car. As a result, she had to rely on public transportation—a long, often unreliable bus ride with two transfers—to get her children to their out-of-district charter school. A referral was made to DCPP due to tardiness, absences, and lack of stable housing, which resulted in her children being removed and placed in separate foster care homes. After Sabrina’s children returned home, the State continued to garnish Sabrina’s wages to pay child support arrears, exacerbating her financial struggles even further.





New Partnership with Eversheds Sutherland Assists Clients with Guardianship Matters



LSNJ's Richard Routh in New York City with partners from Eversheds Sutherland and the Julia Kirsch Foundation.

LSNJ recently embarked on a new pro bono partnership with Eversheds Sutherland and the Julia Kirsch Foundation, with a special focus on clients with New Jersey guardianship matters. Staff of LSNJ's Legal Assistance to Medical Patients (LAMP) Project provided on-site training on this important legal topic in June to kick start the initiative.

Legal Assistance to Medical Patients (LAMP) Project Pro Bono Volunteer Training—Working with Transgender and Nonbinary Clients Seeking Name Changes

On June 25, LSNJ, through its LAMP Project, provided a training for pro bono volunteers, "Working with Transgender and Non-Binary Clients Seeking Name Changes." The virtual training, held on Zoom, included a lecture presentation and question and answer portion, and covered processes for name changes on various records, such as birth certificates, marriage licenses, the Social Security Administration, passports, school records, and driver's licenses. The training was designed to help support

a collaborative project with Robert Wood Johnson Barnabas Health that provides legal assistance to the low-income transgender and non-binary community to legally affirm their names. Pro bono volunteer trainer Bill Singer of Singer & Fedun was joined by LSNJ's Akil Roper and Richard Routh, and Patrick Koslecki, Director of Diversity & Inclusion, Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center.



LSNJ's Pro Bono Involvement Administrator Janet Ashley-Naouli with longtime pro bono volunteer Bill Singer. Ashley-Naouli and LSNJ Outreach Director Alayna Berg caught up with Singer and other volunteers at the New Jersey State Bar Annual Meeting and Convention in May.

Workers Legal Rights Project Takes Its Show on the Road



LSNJ WLRP staff Keith Talbot, Sarah Hymowitz, and Tanya Simmon with hosts from Middlesex College.

Through a new partnership with the New Jersey Department of Labor, LSNJ's Workers Legal Rights Project (WLRP) increased community outreach activities this year, distributing literature about workers' rights in New Jersey to hundreds across the state. Visits included Middlesex County Community College, Make the Road New Jersey, New Jersey Department of Labor events, the Immigration and American Citizenship Organization, Oceanside Family Success Center, and the NAACP.

WLRP advises workers of their rights in unemployment claims and appeals, workplace safety, wage and hour issues, and other issues affecting workers in New Jersey. In addition to individual advice and representa-

tion and literature, WLRP recently released a new video to guide people through the process of applying for unemployment benefits. Watch it on our YouTube channel or on [LSNJLAW.org](https://www.lsnjlaw.org).





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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