

“Environmental Justice in New Jersey” Webinar Features Public Officials, Legal Advocates, and Medical Professionals



The latest installment of the Melville “De” Miller, Jr. Justice Series, held on December 9, 2022, explored environmental justice and the impact of environmental hazards on *overburdened communities* (OBCs)—defined by New Jersey law as a census block group with specific poverty, racial, and language proficiency characteristics—as well as the fight for fairer environmental laws and protections from unsafe conditions in New Jersey. The panel of experts was moderated by LSNJ Senior Vice President Akil Roper and approximately 700 attendees participated. To watch this and previous Justice Series webinars, visit

www.lsnj.org/JusticeSeries.aspx.

Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, New Jersey Legislative District #15 discussed the impacts of industrial facilities on air and water quality in our communities, as well as New Jersey’s recently passed Environmental Justice Law. Still in the regulation phase, the law requires the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to evaluate the environmental and public health impacts of certain facilities on OBCs and places responsibilities and obligations on those facilities.

Melissa Miles, executive director of the New Jersey Environmental

Justice Alliance, examined environmental justice through a lens of race and poverty and discussed the goals and accomplishments of the Alliance, including the environmental justice bill of 2020, which was the result of over a decade of advocacy.

Olga D. Pomar, housing preservation and community development coordinator at South Jersey Legal Services, provided historical context and described her involvement in the landmark case on behalf of Camden Waterfront South, the first court decision to hold that failure to consider race, income, and environmental

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President's Message

There is much to celebrate within this issue of *Poverty to Justice*: the continued growth and success of the Melville "De" Miller, Jr. Justice Series, free public programming exploring important social, legal, and economic justice issues; an impactful event commemorating the 55th anniversary, rich history, and profound impact of Legal Services in New Jersey; the critical work and outreach of one of LSNJ's newest units, our anti-trafficking project PROTECT; and the meaningful contributions of countless staff, interns, volunteers, sponsors, and supporters.



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

Even as we laud these efforts, we must recognize there is much work left yet undone. As the latest installation of the Melville "De" Miller, Jr. Justice Series highlighted, we must confront and redress the worsening

and disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on low-income populations and communities of color.

Even as we commemorate 55 years of service, including major positive changes in every area of law that impacts low-income New Jerseyans

and the direct service of more than 8 million people, we know that the promise of equal justice remains unfilled, with far too many low-income Americans unable to access lawyers to help them navigate the urgent, multiple, complex, or compounding civil legal issues they so frequently encounter.

While many New Jerseyans have begun to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, our state's low-income residents continue to face dire economic challenges. As pandemic-era protections expire, rising costs of food, rent, childcare, and so many essentials continue to push vulnerable New Jerseyans further into poverty. Indeed, according to the latest U.S. Census Bureau Data, more than 3,095,628 New Jerseyans—or 34% of all state residents—currently live in true poverty, representing an increase in the past year of almost 200,000 people who are now experiencing deprivation and newly eligible for our services.

As we continue to respond to increased client need, I thank you for your strong and continued support. Thank you for dedicating your time, energy, effort, and resources to the fight against poverty and injustice, and for following, uplifting, and supporting the efforts of Legal Services advocates across the state.

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burdens of a community in siting and permitting constitutes a violation of civil rights. At the time, this marked the most far-reaching environmental justice decision decided favorably by a trial court anywhere in the U.S. and became a rallying point for the low-income community in Camden.

“The interesting thing about working in this community,” says Pomar, “is that the folks there would have never defined themselves as ‘environmentalists’ or ‘environmental justice activists.’ ... Their environmental justice activism grew ... [when] people came together to talk about how to improve the neighborhood, what the neighborhood needed, what were its strengths and weaknesses, and the things that they wanted to address were all environmental-related.”

Rounding out the program was Dr. Nicky Sheats, director of the Center for the Urban Environment at the John S. Watson Institute for Urban Policy and Research at Kean University, who provided important perspectives on two key policy issues prioritized by the environmental justice community: cumulative impacts, which he described as the risks and impacts caused by multiple pollutants, usually emitted by multiple sources of pollution in a community, and their interaction with each other and with social vulnerabilities that exist in a community; and climate change mitigation.

“[R]ace continues to be the number one determinant of whether or not you live near egregious pollution. ... Pollution is a knee on the neck on Black people in this country—particularly Black people in low-income communities.”

- Melissa Miles, Executive Director, New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance



“[I]f you live in New Jersey, the amount of pollution in your neighborhood is connected directly to race and income—the amount of money in your pocket and the color of your skin.”

- Dr. Nicky Sheats, Director Center for the Urban Environment at the John S. Watson Institute for Urban Policy and Research at Kean University



Legal Services

commemorates

55

YEARS OF ADVANCING JUSTICE

Legal Services of New Jersey hosted a commemoration of 55 years of statewide service on Thursday, December 8, at the Addison Park in Aberdeen, with approximately 400 guests in attendance, including staff, board members, clients, and sponsors.

Longtime friend of Legal Services and partner in the creation of the Anti-Poverty Network, the Reverend Bruce H. Davidson provided the invocation, observing, "We are a wonderfully diverse group of people gathering tonight, but we are united in our commitment to equal justice for everybody, and especially justice on behalf of those who don't have access to it in our sometimes unbalanced society."

Highlights included remarks from New Jersey Supreme Court Chief Justice Stuart J. Rabner, who listed the many



contributions of Legal Services advocates and stated, "You are a source of inspiration to all of us in the legal community who know and appreciate what you're doing," and LSNJ Board Chair Cynthia Jacob, who praised statewide staff, saying, "Through everything, Legal Services has soldiered through the storm and emerged strong and enthusiastic to deal with the tasks ahead."

LSNJ-produced videos, *Advancing Justice—New Jersey Legal Services at 55 Years* and *Our Clients' Stories—The Difference We Make*, chronicled the history of Legal Services and recent client success stories. Both can be found on the LSNJ.org website, along with a photo slideshow and highlight reel of the evening's proceedings at www.lsnj.org/55.

"Through everything, Legal Services has soldiered through the storm and emerged strong and enthusiastic to deal with the tasks ahead."

- Cynthia M. Jacob, Esq.
Chair, Legal Services of New Jersey Board of Trustees

We would like to thank the following generous sponsors of the 55th Anniversary Commemorative Dinner.

Equal Justice Leader



Equal Justice Partner



Ramona Romero and Blaise Santianni

Equal Justice Supporter



Karol Corbin Walker, Esq.



Equal Justice Friend



Dawn K. Miller, Esq.



Left: LSNJ President Dawn K. Miller, Esq. with guests from Verizon: Alycia M. Guichard, Vandana Venkatesh, Thomas DiResta, and Nicholas Vogt



Right: Guests from Porzio Bromberg & Newman: Vito A. Gagliardi, Jr., and Renee L. Davis

Special Induction of Melville “De” Miller, Jr. into the NJEJLA Circle of Honor

The 55th anniversary commemorative program concluded with the posthumous induction of co-founder and former LSNJ President Melville “De” Miller, Jr. into the New Jersey Equal Justice Library and Archive (NJEJLA) Circle of Honor. Analogous to “halls of fame” for other institutions, the Circle of Honor memorializes those who have made extraordinary achievements in advancing equal justice, and whose efforts and lives stand as enduring paradigms for others to emulate.

President Emeritus of Legal Services of New Jersey, Miller was one of LSNJ’s five original incorporators in 1973 and was instrumental in establishing the statewide Legal Services system that exists today. With this tribute, he joins the following list of distinguished Circle of Honor

members: The Honorable James H. Coleman, Jr. (former Justice, Supreme Court of New Jersey), Robert Del Tufo (former New Jersey Attorney General), Douglas S. Eakeley (LSNJ Board of Trustees; former Chair, Board of Directors, Legal Services Corporation), Kenneth C. Frazier (former Executive Chairman of the Board, Merck and Co., Inc.), the Honorable Thomas H. Kean (48th Governor of New Jersey), Wynona M. Lipman (New Jersey’s first Black female State Senator), the Honorable Deborah T. Poritz (first female Chief Justice, Supreme Court of New Jersey), Stanley C. Van Ness (first Public Advocate, State of New Jersey), Bonnie Watson Coleman (U.S. Representative, New Jersey’s 12th Congressional District), Loretta Weinberg (former Senate Majority Leader, 37th Legislative District), and

the Honorable Robert N. Wilentz (former Chief Justice, Supreme Court of New Jersey).

Members of Miller’s family were in attendance to accept the award, presented by LSNJ Vice President Claudine Langrin, and an original poem was written and read by LSNJ Vice President Anisa Rahim. A biography and tribute video can be found on the NJEJLA website at www.njejla.org/circleofhonor.

“He had it all in him, turbulence and calm, curiosity and brilliance.

A reconciler of opposites, reveling in challenges and complications, he took mischievous joy in surprising you with unexpected words and obscure references.”

- Excerpt from original poem, “A Social Justice Warrior”

Written and read by Anisa Rahim, Esq., MFA and LSNJ Vice President



"As we honor De's lifetime contributions and legacy alongside Legal Services' 55-year history, I'm reminded and inspired by the words of esteemed civil rights leader and activist, John Robert Lewis. Our collective fight for justice is not, as he says, 'the struggle of one day, one week, or one year, but the struggle of a lifetime, or maybe even many lifetimes, and each one of us in every generation must do our part.'"

- Dawn K. Miller, Esq.

President, Legal Services of New Jersey



National Human Trafficking Prevention Month

"I didn't want even to go for a walk outside because I thought he would be waiting for me."

- Tamires, Legal Services Client

Watch Tamires' video on

[www.lsnj.org/
ClientsVideosStories.aspx](http://www.lsnj.org/ClientsVideosStories.aspx).

One Client's Story

As the end of her au pair contract drew near, Tamires was offered a job by a local storeowner, who lured her with the promise of a high salary and the chance to become his business partner. He even offered to help her become a U.S. citizen. Tamires was leery of his aggressive pitch, but did not want to miss an exciting opportunity.

Hours worked—dubbed "training"—went unpaid; her new "boss" acquired her identification and visa documents under the pretext that he needed to make copies, and then claimed he did not have them; he harassed her with texts, pressured her to end friendships, and demanded she meet him at the store—threatening to come after her if she did not show. When her host family learned of these

threats and contacted the police, he accused Tamires of stealing tens of thousands of dollars and tried to have her arrested.

Legal Services helped Tamires share her story with law enforcement in an effort to prevent this man from victimizing others in the future. She was referred to an anti-trafficking program for counseling and assisted by Legal Services with a humanitarian immigration application for lawful status.



January is National Human Trafficking Prevention Month—a month dedicated to raising awareness about human trafficking and educating the public about how to identify and prevent this crime. As part of this critical effort, LSNJ PROTECT, Legal Services' anti-trafficking initiative, launched a social media campaign to share resources, including the legal education material available on the LSNJLAWSM website; published new articles in the January-February issue of Looking Out For Your Legal Rights newsletter; and participated in a number of public webinars and tabling events—described in more detail on the opposite page.

National Human Trafficking Prevention Month

Human Trafficking Awareness Month presents an opportunity to educate ourselves about human trafficking and learn the signs to identify it. Throughout the month of January, LSNJ PROTECT, which serves survivors of both sex and labor human trafficking, joined community partners at various awareness events throughout New Jersey. This year, PROTECT:

- Partnered with the NJ Coalition Against Human Trafficking (shown at right) to host a free public event at the North Brunswick Public Library to educate the community on the signs of human trafficking and how best to prevent it.

Continued on next page

In 2021, 10,359 situations of human trafficking were reported to the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline involving 16,554 individual victims. Shocking as these numbers are, they are likely only a fraction of the actual problem.

From PolarisProject.org



LSNJ frequently partners with NJCAHT on trafficking outreach events, including this one at the North Brunswick Public Library.

“PROTECT provides holistic legal services to victims of human trafficking, and helps advance them on their journey from victim to survivor to thriver. By providing critical resources and relationships, PROTECT is an invaluable partner of the New Jersey Coalition Against Human Trafficking (NJCAHT) in their mission to unite the state’s communities to end human trafficking in New Jersey.”

*- Susan Panzica, Board Secretary, NJCAHT
Executive Director, Justice Network*

National Human Trafficking Prevention Month

- Provided a training to the Rutgers School of Social Work, "Voices from the Field," on legal and social services for human trafficking survivors.
- Hosted a table at the annual Attorney General's Human Trafficking Awareness Day with the theme "Human Trafficking and Persons with Disabilities." This event was held for the first time in person again since 2020 and marked an important chance to meet community partners and share resources with the larger public.
- Partnered again with the NJ Coalition against Human Trafficking and the North Brunswick Library to host a virtual workshop titled "Human Trafficking Awareness and Prevention: Engaging and Empowering Youth and Families." This free virtual workshop provided educational tools to adolescents, young adults, and their parents/caregivers.



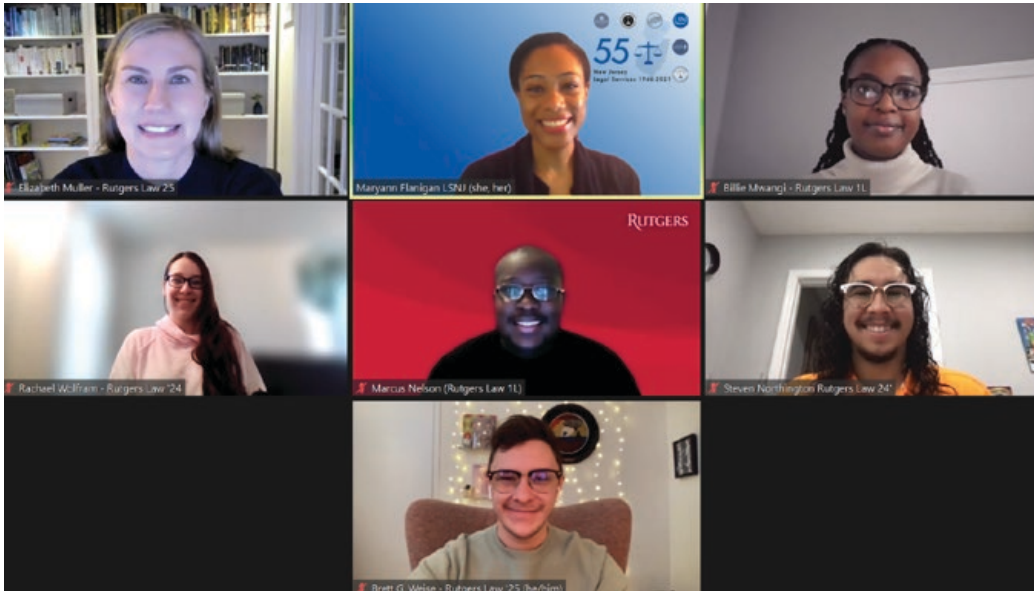
Librarian Ryan Miller and LSNJ's Taylor Iodice at the North Brunswick Public Library. Miller has been instrumental in helping get the word out to patrons about Legal Services.

- Co-sponsored and participated in the 2023 legislative breakfast titled "Addressing Human Trafficking in New Jersey: Law, Policy and Practice," hosted by the Montclair Global Institute for Human Trafficking.
- In conjunction with the Legal Assistance to Medical Patients (LAMP) Project, provided a training to hospital staff at Newark Beth Israel on the social and legal needs of human trafficking survivors.

"My hope is that everyone in attendance will gain an understanding of how they, as individuals, can help prevent the suffering of human trafficking, and what resources exist to assist in healing survivors of human trafficking."

*- Ryan Miller, Librarian,
North Brunswick Public
Library (shown above)*

THANK YOU TO OUR WINTER LAW INTERNS! WE SO APPRECIATE YOUR HELP.



A very special thank you to our winter law interns from Rutgers Law—Elizabeth Muller, Billie Mwangi, Rachael Wolfram, Marcus Nelson, Steven Northington, and Brett G. Weise—all shown to the left with LSNJ Vice President Maryann Flanigan.

It's not too late to donate to the Campaign for Justice

Your tax-deductible contribution will help us accept more cases and provide the legal expertise and the access to justice our clients need. Learn more at www.lsnj.org/cfj.



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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
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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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