

## LSNJ President Dawn K. Miller Provides Remarks at the 2024 Statewide Swearing-In of New Attorneys



Photos courtesy of the New Jersey State Bar Association

LSNJ President Dawn K. Miller, Esq., shared remarks about the unique role of lawyers in ensuring access to justice for New Jersey's most vulnerable residents at the swearing in of more than 100 recent law school graduates to the state and federal bars.

### Excerpt from Miller's remarks:

As attorneys, you now hold the tools to make a meaningful difference. With your legal skills, you have the ability to lift up those who are often overlooked and help bridge the justice gap for society's most vulnerable.

The need is overwhelming. For the over 3 million people in New Jersey who live in True Poverty, the cost of legal representation is simply out of reach, and they are too often left without the legal help they desperately need. You, as new attorneys, can help change that. For those New Jerseyans living in poverty, the civil legal issues they face are not just challenges—they are almost always a life-altering crisis.

Consider the family threatened with eviction or behind on the mortgage, the survivor who needs protection from abuse or the child who needs special services. By taking on pro bono cases, you can make a real difference in their lives.

The privilege of being an attorney also carries with it a responsibility—a duty to use your knowledge and expertise for the greater good. Indeed, RPC 6.1 makes it a "professional responsibility" for every lawyer to render public interest legal service and expressly embraces, as key methods to meet this obligation, the provision of professional services at no or reduced cost to persons of limited means.

While I am here today to congratulate you, I am also here to urge you to consider incorporating pro bono work into your career. It's not just about giving back; it's about recognizing that justice is a right, not a privilege. Think about the single mother facing eviction, the formerly incarcerated needing to expunge a record, the unemployed, or the refugee family struggling through a complex legal maze.

These are not just cases or legal issues. They are real people whose lives are in the balance. And you, as attorneys, now have the power to help.



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

I am pleased to share that we are currently seeking sponsors for our upcoming Equal Justice Awards reception, scheduled for April 29 at The Palace at Somerset Park. This event serves as a powerful reminder that our mission—access to justice for all New Jerseyans—is a collective, community effort.

Year after year, we embrace this occasion to honor the incredible, far-reaching impact and contributions of volunteer attorneys, law firms, legislators, advocates, community members, and partner organizations across

the state in our shared mission to ensure justice for all. We each have a role—and a stake—in the fight for equal justice.

The program will highlight and honor the contributions of Legal Services pro bono volunteers, whose time, effort, and expertise has proved exceptionally important during a time of increased

client need. Special presentations will honor Covenant House New Jersey; David Culley, Esq. of the Hunterdon County Bar Association; the Expungement Law Project at Rutgers Law School–Camden; Georgene Sfraga Panza, Esq., and Senate Majority Leader M. Teresa Ruiz.

We will also induct the esteemed Lieutenant Governor Sheila Y. Oliver (posthumous) 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.

By sponsoring this special event, you not only demonstrate your continued support for equal access to justice in New Jersey; you will also receive complimentary tickets to the event and public recognition to show our appreciation. More information about sponsoring the 2025 EJA can be found at [www.lsnj.org/EJA/Sponsorship.aspx](http://www.lsnj.org/EJA/Sponsorship.aspx).

*Congratulations  
to all of the  
2025 Equal  
Justice Award  
recipients  
and thank  
you for your  
commitment  
to advancing  
justice!*



## Clients like Ellie Rely on Pro Bono Volunteers to Get the Help They Need



For ten years, since Ellie first began her transition, she had been unable to navigate the process of a legal name change on her own. With important documents and accounts in her previous name, she had to repeatedly explain herself to banks, insurance companies, and government offices. Over the phone, they would ask her to put her husband on the phone; ask her to put *him* on the phone. The silence on the other end once she explained was “heartbreaking.”

Ellie finally received help from Bill Singer, long-time volunteer attorney with LSNJ’s Pro Bono Project, who she describes as “so helpful and so kind.” She says it has changed her life. “I don’t have any clients who are more appreciative than my Legal Services

clients for what I am doing for them,” says Bill. “Knowing the difficulties that transgender and gender non-binary people have in their daily lives, it just seems so compelling to do this work.”

“Your legal name affects so much,” she explains. “Every time I used to call myself Ellie in public, it always felt like there is an asterisk next to that statement—that that statement wasn’t truth; that I was fibbing a bit. What was your real name? What’s your legal name? It’s always that question that was behind everything. ... But, after that, that was my real name. That was my true name. And words can’t really explain how important that is. How important it is to be called by your name. ... It means so much.”

*“So many other trans people like me often have to compromise with the world, often have to use things like nicknames or just things to get by. You don’t have to do that. You can just contact Legal Services.”*

### ***Congratulations to the 2025 EJA Exceptional Pro Bono Contributors!***

Matthew Fredericks, Esq.  
Lori Hirsch, Esq.  
Donna L. Freidel, Esq.  
Talbot B. Kramer, Esq.  
Carl Levitt, Esq.  
Shaun S. Peterson, Esq.  
Bill Singer, Esq.

## Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Access to Justice in New Jersey

On December 9, 2024, Legal Services of New Jersey presented the latest webinar in its Melville “De” Miller, Jr., Justice Series, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Access to Justice in New Jersey with 835 participants and a panel moderated by LSNJ Senior Vice President Akil Roper.

Panelists included Laks Kattalai, chief information officer of the New Jersey Judiciary Administrative Office of the Courts, Jessica Lewis Kelly, Esq., special assistant to the administrative director of the New Jersey Judiciary Administrative Office of the Courts, Jennifer Sellitti, Esq., public defender of the New Jersey Office of the Public Defender, Trish Perlmutter, Esq., associate director for Policy, Outreach, and Community Relations with the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights (DCR), and Abdul Rehman Khan, Esq., assistant clinical professor with the Seton Hall University School of Law Center for Social Justice.

Judiciary representatives Lewis Kelly and Kattalai provided a framework for understanding AI and discussed recent court initiatives, training, and public awareness.

Khan addressed the critical importance of centering and deeply understanding the needs of the com-

munities we serve in any legal design process involving AI. Khan also advocated for the exploration of strategies that employ various and diverse tools in order to reach the most people with the greatest need. Given their orientation as the largest legal provider in the criminal court, and in representing low-income and communities of color, Sellitti discussed the need for the Public Defender’s office to have direct access to cutting-edge AI tools and



*In response to the question: “Does AI have the potential to help us bridge the justice gap?”*

*Yes, it absolutely has that capacity, but only if we establish the right policies, the right guardrails, and only if we maintain a focus on all people who are a part of the community that we seek to serve, which includes not only the many attorneys in our state (and thank you to so many for being with us here today), but also the many people who don’t have legal representation, and the many people who don’t have as much legal representation as they might otherwise need to truly have access to justice and to navigate the court system.*

*- Jessica Lewis Kelly, Esq.*



We are working on initial guidance on algorithmic discrimination under the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination. And that guidance will make clear that the LAD continues to apply, no matter the mechanism. You know, whether it's individual decision-making or decision-making that's aided by an algorithmic system that makes recommendations, our laws continue to apply and protect New Jerseyans.

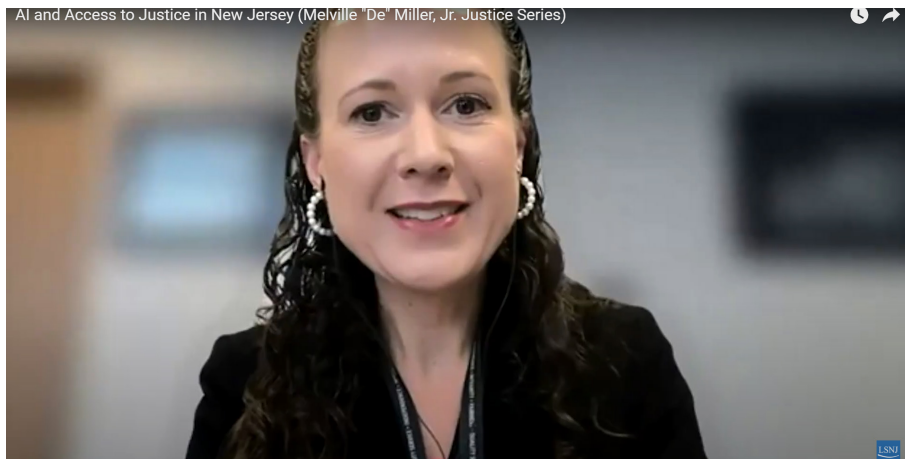
- Trish Perlmutter, Esq.

the ability to leverage those tools for clients.

Panelists shared their unique perspectives on access to justice and responded to a number of challenging questions around topics such as security risks, the potential for discrimination, and ethical concerns. While some general concerns were raised regarding the use of AI, the discussion largely focused on the potential

benefits and best use cases to help support increased access and greater protections. Perlmutter, for example, discussed DCR's algorithmic discrimination unit, which was designed to identify and help defend against the disparate impact of automated decision-making tools and the deployment of AI in its strategic enforcement of civil rights laws including the Fair Chance in Housing Act. Collectively, the panelists provided important viewpoints and continue to contribute to the ongoing discussion around AI, technology, and justice.

*The Melville "De" Miller Justice Series offers free CLS credits for lawyers in New Jersey, is open to the general public, and created in honor of LSNJ's founder, De Miller. The programs are designed to highlight areas of broad social and legal justice that have an impact on the low-income community in New Jersey—from new advocacy or government initiatives to specific issues or areas of law. View prior webinars at [www.lsnj.org/JusticeSeries.aspx](http://www.lsnj.org/JusticeSeries.aspx).*



*Top: Trish Perlmutter, Esq., associate director for Policy, Outreach, and Community Relations with the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights (DCR)  
Bottom: Jessica Lewis Kelly, Esq., special assistant to the administrative director of the New Jersey Judiciary Administrative Office of the Courts*

# LSNJ PROTECT Attends Annual Human Trafficking Prevention and Awareness Event

On January 16, 2025, the Office of the Attorney General in New Jersey hosted its annual Human Trafficking Awareness Event entitled: “The Intersection of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, and Human Trafficking”. Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin opened by thanking everyone in attendance and sharing the efforts his office has facilitated to end human

trafficking. Specifically, he provided an update on the STALLS project, which began last year and involves outfitting public restroom stalls across New Jersey with information on human trafficking resources.

The program continued with a presentation by Jessica Kitson and Michelle Lefkowitz, two attorneys who work with survivors of interpersonal

violence, and Nicole Fusco, who explained how forensic nursing aids in the criminal cases against perpetrators of human trafficking. Nurses Ingrid Johnson and Melissa Cramer shared information about creative ways in which their hospitals identify survivors and connect them to providers.

The heart of the program was Gina Cavallo, a speaker with lived experience in human trafficking. Her emotional story demonstrated the importance of multidisciplinary coordination among the various providers in the state. She did not benefit from a coordinated response when she was young, but she has worked extremely hard to ensure that for other survivors through her advocacy efforts in New Jersey and across the country.

PROTECT staff were in attendance to share resources and support the efforts to end trafficking across the state. “The Attorney General’s event is a great opportunity to meet other

service providers in person and build relationships so we can better serve our clients,” says Sheppard-Singh.



*LSNJ PROTECT Chief Counsel Avtar K. Sheppard-Singh and Social Worker Monica Kristen share resources with other service providers*



# Tax Legal Assistance Project Helps Senior Get His Money Back

Dave is approaching 90 years old. He lives on a fixed Social Security income in an assisted living facility. When his bank account was garnished more than \$4,000 by the New Jersey Department of Taxation, he had no idea that it was due to his deceased ex-wife's tax debt. They had been divorced for 12 years and Dave did not even realize her name was still on his bank account. He applied for help through LSNJ's Tax Legal Assistance Project, but says he was not hopeful.

Dave's case was assigned to

Fitzroy, who reached out directly to the Division of Taxation. The Division agreed to return Dave's funds by check. However, the address they had on file was not current, so the check never reached Dave. He recalls thinking, "We'll never find out what happened to that check." Legal Services persevered, contacting the Division again to ask them to cancel the check and update the address on file.

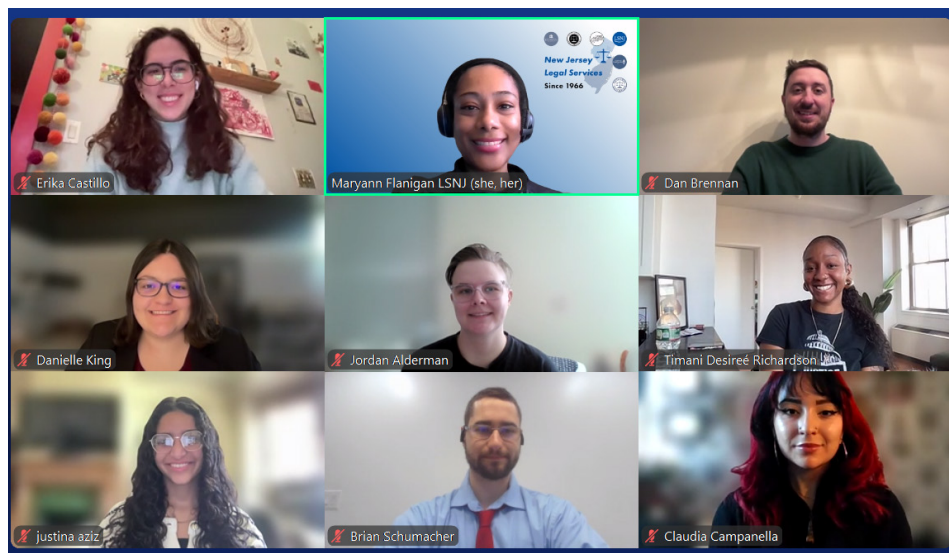
"You [Legal Services] got back money that I thought was gone forever," says

Dave. "Even when I did not keep in touch sometimes, Fitzroy would call me and tell me that you're working on it, and that it was being done. I think that's a wonderful service that you are providing and I'm glad to be a recipient of it."



## Thank you to our winter interns!

Thank you and best wishes to our Rutgers University Law winter break interns. These students assisted with research and writing in the areas of consumer, domestic violence, foreclosure, immigration, and tenancy. We wish you the best in your studies and future careers!



*In order: Erika Castillo, LSNJ's Maryann Flanigan, Dan Brennan, Danielle King, Jordan Alderman, Timani Richardson, Justina Aziz, Brian Schumacher, and Erika Campanella*





[www.LSNJLAW.org](http://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](http://www.LSNJ.org) – An organizational website where you can learn about the work of Legal Services.

[www.PROBONONJ.org](http://www.PROBONONJ.org) – A site where attorneys can learn about and sign up for pro bono opportunities.

[www.NJEJLA.org](http://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](mailto: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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