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FOR RELEASE AT WILL

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LEGAL SERVICES OF NEW JERSEY VISIONARY MELVILLE D. MILLER, JR. DIES

EDISON — Melville D. Miller Jr., President Emeritus of Legal Services of New Jersey, beloved in the world of legal aid organizations nationally, has died.

The death of the man who led LSNJ for five decades as its President and General Counsel was announced Wednesday by current LSNJ President Dawn K. Miller. She informed the LSNJ and statewide staff of the passing of the man who was one of LSNJ's incorporators back in 1971, was instrumental in establishing the statewide Legal Services system that exists today and, until last year, was the only CEO LSNJ ever had.

"There are no words that will adequately describe the pain and profound sorrow we are all feeling," she said about the man widely known as De. "He has been the backbone of our organization since its inception, and he certainly has left a remarkable legacy of helping the poor in our state. It was his lifelong focus. It is a legacy that we will embrace and continue to grow in his honor. His visionary leadership and unparalleled achievement on behalf of the Legal Services community and low-income clients in New Jersey has been conducted with brilliance, courage, creativity, commitment, and a relentless pursuit of justice and desire to improve the lives of the poor. He will be sorely missed."

That legacy is documented by the rollout of achievements and hard numbers during his days at the helm of LSNJ and its five regional offices across the Garden State. During those more than 50 years Legal Services has provided free legal representation in more than 2.6 million civil legal issues involving some 9 million poor New Jerseyans.

Cynthia M. Jacobs, chairperson of LSNJ board of directors, said the message that Miller brought home to New Jersey resonates: “He made New Jerseyans far better understand the depth and consequences to the poor of our state. And he was a dogged fighter to that end. In short, he cared. His passion for Legal Services and its clients was all consuming, second only for his love for family.”

She noted that, through all the funding challenges for Legal Services “De Miller stood fast as a stalwart in keeping Legal Services afloat in hard times and maintaining the most crucial services the impoverished and others need. He never gave up even in the hardest of times.”

In that regard, his own words when he announced he was stepping aside as LSNJ president, tell the story. “At some point I trust Legal Services of New Jersey ultimately will lay out a meaningful roadmap for public officials to deal with poverty and the horrendous impact it has on generations to come.”

In fact, the LSNJ Poverty Research Institute, a unit which was created under Miller’s guidance, has been in the process of developing a series of data-based reports designed to spotlight how poverty has steadily increased in one of the wealthiest states of the nation, reaching the point that there are some 3 million New Jerseyans in what Miller defined as “true poverty” or those essentially living daily lives of “deprivation.”

Miller, 76, a resident of Tewksbury, was predeceased by Louise, his wife of 48 years, and leaves behind his three children, Tristan, Koren, and Kendra, and eight living grandchildren. His family meant the world to him, and he continued to enjoy frequent weekend drives to visit his family in North Carolina. He helped create or assist anti-poverty organizations outside LSNJ, and was a prolific writer, authoring “You and the Law in New Jersey” in 1988, and many other publications. He argued before the New Jersey Supreme Court on a number of occasions, and served on many judicial committees providing recommendations and advice to the court on possible policy changes and emergency situations, including, for example, tenancy and foreclosure

issues affecting tens of thousands of New Jersey residents. In recent weeks, he had told colleagues he believed that many of the problems affecting people of color and poor residents during COVID-19 surfaced and intensified because those same underlying issues had not been dealt with adequately in the past.

The 1969 Harvard Law School graduate served on numerous national and state committees and organizations. He was the recipient of many awards, including the prestigious Award of Excellence from the Thurgood Marshall College Fund.

Word of Miller's passing brought comments from many in the state's legal circles.

From former New Jersey State Bar President Thomas R. Curtin, "De was a good man, a good leader, a good lawyer and an inspiration to so many. His motto to new lawyers: Do well...and do good."

Timothy Madden, former executive director of Northeast New Jersey Legal Services regional office: "His insight, commitment to people in poverty and legal acumen were unmatched in New Jersey and the country."

Former New Jersey Supreme Court Justice Peter G. Verniero: "De was a giant in his field and a fundamentally decent person. The loss is tremendous and will be felt deeply by the State and by all who knew him personally."

Former New Jersey State Bar Association President Karol Corbin Walker: "His impact on the legal landscape and community in New Jersey will live on forever."

Since the news of his untimely passing, LSNJ has received an outpouring of support. If you would like to leave a comment or send a donation, please email DeMillerRemembrances@lsnj.org.

Funeral arrangements are pending.

Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ), located in Edison, heads the state's Legal Services system, a network of six independent non-profit corporations and has been providing free essential legal aid in civil matters to low-income people through offices in all 21 counties for more than 50 years. Since its inception, LSNJ has provided representation in more than 2.6 million cases.

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