

New Jersey Legal Services Programs

Legal Services of New Jersey

100 Metroplex Drive, Suite 402

P.O. Box 1357

Edison, NJ 08818-1357

Other office: Bridgeton

Melville D. Miller, Jr., President

Central Jersey Legal Services

Covering Mercer, Middlesex, and Union counties

317 George Street, Suite 201

New Brunswick, NJ 08901

(732) 249-7600

Other offices: Perth Amboy, Trenton, Elizabeth

Director: Paul V. Mullin

Essex-Newark Legal Services

Covering Essex County

5 Commerce Street, 2nd Floor

Newark, New Jersey 07102

(973) 624-4500

Director: Felipe Chavana

Legal Services of Northwest Jersey

Covering Hunterdon, Morris, Somerset, Sussex, and Warren counties

34 West Main Street, Suite 301

Somerville, NJ 08876

(908) 231-0840

Other offices: Flemington, Morristown, Belvidere, Newton

Executive Director: Diane K. Smith

Northeast New Jersey Legal Services

Covering Bergen, Hudson, and Passaic counties

574 Summit Avenue, 3rd Floor

Jersey City, NJ 07306-2797

(201) 792-6363

Other offices: Hackensack, Paterson

Director: John H. Fitzgerald

Ocean-Monmouth Legal Services

Covering Ocean and Monmouth counties

303 West Main Street, 3rd Floor

Freehold, NJ 07728

(732) 866-0020

Other office: Toms River

Executive Director: William Rempel

South Jersey Legal Services

Covering Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland,

Gloucester, and Salem counties

745 Market Street

Camden, NJ 08102

(856) 964-2010

Other offices: Atlantic City, Cape May Court House,

Mt. Holly, Pennsville, Vineland, Woodbury

Executive Director: Douglas E. Gershuny



The New Jersey Legal Services System at a Glance

Mission—Providing Essential Legal Aid

LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAMS are the primary vehicle by which society provides free legal assistance in civil matters to people who cannot afford the cost of legal representation. Legal Services focuses its work on the most pressing and important legal needs of low-income people—essential legal aid. The mission is to secure the greatest possible measure of substantive and procedural justice for its clients, with a special emphasis on expanding economic opportunity for those in poverty.

Services are provided in response to a broad range of civil legal problems. While the types of cases handled vary from county to county, depending upon local needs and priorities, the range of percentages for New Jersey's Legal Services programs are as follows (actual statewide averages for 2010 are in parentheses):

Housing (principally tenancy matters)	20-34%	(27.7%)
Family (divorce, separation, support, and custody matters)	15-28%	(21.2%)
Consumer (bankruptcy, collection cases, warranties, unfair sales practices, and public utilities)	12-23%	(18.4%)
Income Maintenance (Social Security, Work First New Jersey, SSI, Food Stamps, and other such programs)	10-22%	(17%)

Other cases (15.7%) include education, health, employment, juvenile matters, and individual rights.

Legal Services programs offer a full range of legal assistance, from brief advice and counseling to litigation. Maximizing scarce resources, Legal Services programs are able to resolve four out of five cases without litigation. In 2010, more than 62,000 new cases were opened in New Jersey. Of these, more than 1,900 were handled by volunteer private attorneys on a *pro bono* (no fee) basis. Since its inception in New Jersey in 1966, the Legal Services system has represented more than 2 million people, with a strong record of quality work and superb results.

The Overwhelming Need for Legal Services

For clients to be served through the use of Legal Services Corporation funds, strict federal income eligibility guidelines, set by law at a maximum of 125 percent of the federal Department of Health and Human Services poverty levels, are followed. (For example, the federal poverty threshold for a family of three—a single parent and two children under 18—is \$19,090.) Two other major funding sources cap eligibility at 200% of the federal standard. Other funding sources stipulate their own specific eligibility guidelines.

Many Legal Services clients are employed, including the nearly 10 percent of those in New Jersey who work full-time year-round



yet remain below the poverty line. Nearly two-thirds of those who benefit from Legal Services' representation are children; one out of five adult clients are 60 years of age or older. A significant number are physically or mentally challenged.

Census data indicates that more than 2 million people in New Jersey—approaching one out of every four in the state—have incomes at a level that qualifies them for Legal Services' help. According to the most recent study, more than 460,000 low-income adults in New Jersey have at least one serious civil legal problem each year. Of these, fewer than one in six receive help from a lawyer. There is one private attorney in New Jersey for every 200 members of the general population, excluding those eligible for Legal Services. By contrast, at current funding there is only one Legal Services lawyer for every 10,000 people eligible for services!

The Legal Services System in New Jersey

New Jersey has seven Legal Services programs: six regional programs, which provide direct services to clients in all 21 counties through 23 local offices, and Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ), the statewide coordinating office. Each regional program is a separate not-for-profit corporation governed by a board of trustees, which includes members of the local bar association as well as representatives of the eligible client population.

LSNJ ties these regional program efforts together, providing information, training, legal and administrative coordination, technical assistance, and other support. LSNJ also provides representation to clients in matters of broad or statewide significance, and through special projects initiated in response to particular, emerging needs of the low-income population. Current special projects at LSNJ include:

- **LSNJ-LAW™**, New Jersey's statewide legal hotline, provides brief service, advice, and referral over the telephone. By dialing our toll-free number, 1-888-LSNJ-LAW, clients can speak with attorneys about a range of civil legal issues.
- The **Consumer Protection/Home Defense Project** and the **Anti-Predatory Lending Project** represent victims of improper sales and lending practices. As part of a comprehensive plan to provide assistance to homeowners facing foreclosure, LSNJ established the Legal Services of New Jersey Mortgage Foreclosure Message Information System to provide information on New Jersey's mortgage foreclosure counseling and mediation program. After completing a brief survey at www.lsnjlaw.org/foreclosure, homeowners are provided with information on their eligibility for the program as well as other information about available resources.
- The **Domestic Violence Representation Project** provides representation to victims of domestic violence who seek restraining orders and in matters that arise after a final restraining order has been obtained, and that relate to the care or protection of children.
- The **Education Representation Project** provides advice and representation to clients in certain education cases.
- The **Family Representation Project** provides social worker services and legal advice and representation to low-income parents involved in disputes with the Division of Youth and Family Services, to ensure that a maximum effort is being made to keep families together.
- The **Health Care Access Project®** provides information, advice, referral, advocacy, and representation



tion to low-income people who need help securing medical services from New Jersey's complex health care system.

- The **Immigration Representation Project** provides legal representation to immigrants, especially those seeking asylum, battered women self-petitioning for lawful permanent resident status, and legal permanent residents who must clear their records to open the way to naturalization.
- The **Legal Assistance to Medical Patients Project**, in place at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center, the

Eric B. Chandler Health Center in New Brunswick, and Trinitas Regional Medical Center in Elizabeth, provides legal assistance to low-income patients in the health care setting and trains medical staff to enable them to identify legal barriers to patients' health and make appropriate referrals to the project.



- The **Prisoner Reentry Project** provides advice and representation to prisoners preparing to reenter society, and those who have been released, who face civil legal barriers related to their incarceration.
- The **Senior Citizen Legal Representation Project** provides information, advice, referral, advocacy, and legal representation to lower-income people 60 years of age and older, in areas such as long-term care, simple estate planning, elder financial abuse, and Medicaid/Medicare.
- The **General Representation Unit** accepts clients who cannot otherwise be assisted by regional Legal Services programs due to funding source and other resource limitations.
- The **Supplemental Security Income Project** represents recipients of General Assistance or Temporary Aid to Needy Families who seek federal SSI benefits because of a long-term physical condition.
- The **Tax Legal Assistance Project** provides information, advice, and legal representation in tax matters to low-income taxpayers.
- The **Veterans Legal Assistance Project** provides advice and legal representation to eligible low-income military veterans. VLAP can help veterans presenting claims to the Department of Veterans Affairs in disability and compensation claims. The project does not assist veterans seeking discharge upgrades.
- The **Workers Legal Rights and Farmworker Projects** provide advice and representation to a growing number of low-income workers whose rights have been violated by their employers.

LSNJ is also home to the **Poverty Research Institute**, a research and advocacy project that develops and updates information on the extent and effects of poverty in New Jersey.

Extending the Reach and Effectiveness of Legal Services in New Jersey

New Jersey's Legal Services system achieves significant efficiencies in the sharing of resources through the advanced use of technology. The toll-free hotline is buttressed by a new generation of comprehensive legal education and *pro se* materials, to enable people to resolve issues on their own whenever feasible. This material augments LSNJ's community legal education newsletter, *Looking Out For Your Legal Rights®*, distributed in print primarily through the regional Legal Services offices, and extensive manuals covering domestic violence, tenancy law, divorce, expungement, charity care, termination of parental rights, child abuse and neglect, and lead paint poisoning. LSNJ staff have also authored *You and the Law in New Jersey*, a comprehensive book published by Rutgers University Press. These publications are available to the public on the LSNJ website, www.LSNJ.org. LSNJ also has a website, www.LSNJLAW.org, which provides legal information, forms, publications, resource directories, and links to other sources of information and help. It currently averages more than 25,000 visits per week.

Many New Jersey attorneys make a significant effort to help by accepting referrals of Legal Services cases on a completely voluntary *pro bono* basis. In addition, Merck, Pfizer, and other corporations have established *pro bono* programs within their general counsel staff, augmenting the efforts of more than 2,300 private lawyers who have made themselves available to take *pro bono* cases on referral from Legal Services. To promote and facilitate the enrollment of *pro bono* attorneys with Legal Services, LSNJ has established the website www.ProBonoNJ.org.

Funding Legal Services in New Jersey

In addition to public funding, major efforts are made each year to garner private support from law firms, major corporations, foundations, and private citizens, principally through the Campaign for Justice.