

# LEGAL SERVICES OF NEW JERSEY



## CAMPAIGN FOR JUSTICE 2012

*"Injustice anywhere  
is a threat to justice everywhere."*

*Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

### *Justice Delivered—New Jersey's Legal Services System*

Legal Services programs form the backbone of free civil legal assistance for low-income people in New Jersey. While other organizations provide free legal help in certain matters or to particular populations, only Legal Services offers it to all lower-income people in all types of civil legal matters of greatest importance to them.

Legal Services programs offer a full range of assistance, from brief advice and counseling to litigation. Most common are housing, family, consumer, government benefits, education, health, employment, and juvenile matters. Since 1966, we have provided representation in more than 2 million cases, and millions more have received assistance through self-help materials, preventive legal education and clinics.

New Jersey's Legal Services programs work together as a single, unified system, spearheaded by Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ), the statewide coordinating corporation, and carried out in every county by six regional not-for-profit corporations. In 46 years of providing civil legal help to those in poverty, the statewide Legal Services system has earned a reputation in New Jersey and across the nation for excellence, efficiency and high quality work. Legal Services is an established, well-known, and relied-upon presence in low-income communities throughout the state.

### *The Campaign for Justice*

The Campaign for Justice is the principal opportunity for those in the private sector to help New Jersey's Legal Services programs make progress in closing the justice gap. In 25 years, the Campaign has provided more than \$6.7 million, enough to make a difference for thousands of low-income people in New Jersey. Yet that figure could be much higher, if more took part in the effort to fulfill the promise of "justice for all."



#### **NEW JERSEY'S CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES SYSTEM**

##### **Legal Services of New Jersey**

Edison

##### **Central Jersey Legal Services**

New Brunswick, Perth Amboy, Trenton, Elizabeth

##### **Essex-Newark Legal Services**

Newark

##### **Legal Services of Northwest Jersey**

Somerville, Flemington, Morristown, Belvidere, Newton

##### **Northeast New Jersey Legal Services**

Jersey City, Hackensack, Paterson

##### **Ocean-Monmouth Legal Services**

Toms River, Freehold

##### **South Jersey Legal Services**

Camden, Atlantic City, Cape May Court House,  
Mt. Holly, Vineland, Woodbury

## *Justice Denied*

Justice depends upon realistic access to the courts, which requires the help of a lawyer for most cases. Justice, so defined, is not available to hundreds of thousands—more than 80%—of our fellow New Jerseyans who live in poverty and are confronted by civil legal problems.

Even as demand for Legal Services' help soared during the last recession and its aftermath, statewide Legal Services funding has dropped from a high of \$72 million in 2007 to just over \$40 million today. More than 300 staff statewide have been lost (out of 720), including more than 100 lawyers.

Even during Legal Services' best funding period, only one in five poor New Jerseyans could secure a lawyer's help for a civil case. Today, it's only one in six. More New Jerseyans live in poverty now than at any time in the last three decades. While low-income people have greater legal needs than the general population, there is only one Legal Services lawyer for every 11,000 people eligible for services, compared to one private attorney for every 200 people in the general population.

"It's important in a society that says it lives by the rule of law to make that rule of law apply throughout the society, to all citizens, even those who have the least. And I don't see how you can have justice in a society unless everybody has access to something that is fair, something that is just."

*The Honorable Nicholas deB. Katzenbach  
Former Attorney General  
of the United States*

## *Justice Delivered—How Legal Services Makes a Difference*



**Patricia Gonzales, Lakewood**

Ms. Gonzales's legal problems began when she was awarded the family home in a divorce. Unaware that her husband had stopped paying the mortgage, she returned home with her two children to find foreclosure notices under the door. Trying to keep the house, she filed for bankruptcy, but fell behind on the payments. With the foreclosure still on record, the lender immediately took steps to put Ms. Gonzales's house up for auction. They refused to discuss the matter with her, insisting that only her husband's name was on the mortgage note, even though hers was there as well.

That's when she turned to Legal Services for help. They sued on Ms. Gonzales's behalf and the case settled fully in her favor: She received a monetary award, her mortgage interest rate was reduced substantially and, most important, she still had a home for herself and her children. "My Legal Services lawyer did all the legal stuff. I don't know much about legal stuff. All I know is that if it wasn't for them, I wouldn't have a place to stay with my kids."



**Samson Carr, Belle Meade**

Samson Carr is blind and receives Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. He lives in an apartment with his wife of 37 years, and their daughter. His wife received a small raise, which he thought was too small to require reporting to Social Security, but he was wrong. The change was reported eventually, and Social Security began deducting money from his monthly check to recoup the overpayment—with disastrous consequences. The family income after this deduction was not enough to pay the rent, they quickly fell behind, and were threatened with eviction.

Fortunately, Legal Services represented Mr. Carr in the eviction case, and was able to help him work out an arrangement with his landlord. Grateful for their help, he says "Were it not for Legal Services, we would probably be homeless at this point. ... Often, Legal Services is the only avenue that poor people have to address issues of their concern. ... Simply because you are living at the poverty line doesn't mean you should not have access to the judicial system."