

Legal Services of New Jersey
100 Metroplex Drive at Plainfield Avenue
P.O. Box 1357
Edison, New Jersey 08818-1357

Contact: Maura Sanders
Office Phone: 732-529-8270
E-mail: msanders@lsnj.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 2019

**LEGAL SERVICES OF NEW JERSEY
STATEMENT ON DHS INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS**

“New Jersey’s Department of Human Services announcement of several positive steps towards addressing homelessness among New Jersey’s most vulnerable residents is very promising” declared Maura Sanders, Chief Counsel for Public Benefits at Legal Services of New Jersey.

Sanders added “New written guidance to county and municipal welfare agencies is an important step toward making sure New Jersey’s welfare system meets the “immediate need” requirements under New Jersey’s public assistance statute. The statute is clear that the emergency needs of individuals and families who are homeless or facing of homelessness should be addressed without a delay which can result in serious harm. This new DHS clarification seeks to achieve that goal.”

“We also applaud the Department of Human Services’ announced new commitment to repeal regulations in the Emergency Assistance program and clarify the program eligibility rules. Current rules set a broad “fault” standard and do not properly address the circumstances and needs of the family. LSNJ is hopeful that changes to these regulations will provide a less subjective standard and will eliminate barriers to assistance for the most vulnerable. Very few people choose homelessness; most who are without housing have been trapped by circumstances they cannot control. Changes to the Emergency Assistance regulations should make this recognition a cornerstone of the EA program.”

“The Department of Human Services has also announced a new policy to quickly make childcare assistance to families facing homelessness. This significant change will remove an additional barrier to employment for families overcoming crises.”

“Finally, the Department has also taken important steps to improve access to the Supplemental Nutrition Program for senior citizens and individuals with disabilities, by identifying SNAP recipients who also receive Lifeline Utility Assistance. This new procedure has increased SNAP assistance to 27,000 households in critical need of food assistance.”

Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ), located in Edison, heads the state’s Legal Services system, a network of five 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 2.4 million cases.

#####