



Northeast New Jersey  
Legal Services

# A PASSION FOR JUSTICE

2023 Annual Report





### DEAR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS,

As we look back on the past year at Northeast New Jersey Legal Services (NNJLS), it is clear that a passion for justice is at the heart of everything we do. The theme of this year's annual report, "A Passion for Justice," truly captures the essence of our organization.

Our staff at NNJLS are remarkable in their dedication and commitment. Their passion for what they do is evident in every case they handle and every client they assist. They work tirelessly to ensure that justice is accessible to all, regardless of their circumstances. Their dedication is inspiring and serves as the foundation of our success.

Diversity is a cornerstone of our success at NNJLS. Our team is composed of individuals from diverse backgrounds, bringing unique perspectives and experiences to our work. This diversity enhances our ability to serve our clients effectively and is a source of strength for our organization. We are proud to be an inclusive organization that values the contributions of every team member.

This year, NNJLS has experienced significant growth and expansion, allowing us to launch new programs, and increase our capacity to serve our clients. These achievements are a testament to

the hard work and passion of our team, as well as the support of our community. In this regard, I would be remiss if I didn't give particular kudos to our Executive Director, Leah Ashe, Esq., who has not even celebrated her second anniversary since taking over from the long, successful tenure of her predecessor, Jack Fitzgerald, Esq. When Leah took over, we were still only just coming out of the difficult period of the COVID-19 pandemic. She also stepped in during the middle of contract negotiations with our unions. Leah has not only successfully steered the organization through such transitions but has done so while adding vision and enthusiasm for the expansion of programs, such as outreach to local politicians and policymakers, and bringing in a cadre of new employees with energy and ideas of their own. Her leadership has also been recognized by Legal Services Corporation (LSC), inviting her to participate in LSC-sponsored events and chair a panel discussion of new Executive Directors at their recent 50th Anniversary Gala. Under Leah's successful leadership, we are excited about the future and the opportunities to further our mission.

We are immensely grateful for the support of our partners and supporters. Your generosity and belief in our mission have enabled us to continue our vital work. Together, we are making a difference and ensuring that justice is accessible to all who need it.

Thank you for your ongoing support and for sharing our passion for justice.

With sincere appreciation,

**Jack Jay Wind, Esq.**  
Board Chair

## Letter from our Executive Director Leah Ashe

### DEAR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS,

In the summer of 2023, I began my second year as Executive Director of Northeast New Jersey Legal Services. I am amazed by the positive energy the staff has shown through the program's transition, and am profoundly grateful for their support and continued dedication to the critical work performed to improve the lives of our clients. This year's theme, "A Passion for Justice, A Commitment to Community, A Vision for the Future," is a window into that work and personifies our mission to ensure equal access to justice for residents of Bergen, Hudson, and Passaic Counties, NJ, experiencing poverty.

In this report, we highlight some of the program's managers who are experts in their fields of law. Not only have they continued to exhibit their passion for legal work and set the bar with their representation of clients, but they have also grown into leaders and are training the next generation of NNJLS attorneys and paralegals to assist our clients with their most pressing legal needs. We also say farewell and give a heartfelt thank you to a manager who dedicated 47 years of his legal career to NNJLS, fighting for the rights of clients in consumer law matters.

In the past two years, our work has expanded into new legal areas and services as we discovered fresh ways to reach underserved residents with the introduction of our Veterans Justice Project and Education Law practice. Our outreach efforts have exploded, with staff attending and participating in more than 400 events across our service area in 2023. These endeavors have culminated in several new initiatives that have highlighted our program's uniqueness and creativity, including the very popular "Big 4" and "Make-A-Will" events, where our attorneys



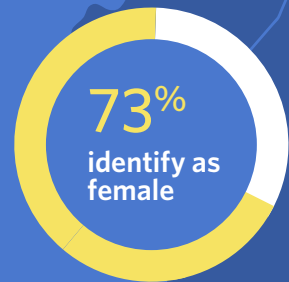
partner with a county surrogate's office or elected officials to talk to seniors and veterans about the four most important documents needed for future planning, and help them start the process of drafting a will. We also planned and held our very first Community Stakeholders Breakfast, where we brought together Hudson County agency partners and elected officials to discuss ways in which we can work together to provide legal and non-legal support to our community residents.

As I reflect on our work in 2023, I am so proud of our staff and what we have accomplished. I am excited to expand our reach into the communities and continue our evolution as a well-established and respected provider of legal services. I know that our program is on the right path and our vision for the future is bright with determination and endless opportunities.

**Leah B. Ashe, Esq.**  
Executive Director

# NNJLS AT A GLANCE

## OUR STAFF



46% Hispanic/Latino

30% White/Non-Hispanic

13% Black/African American

11% Asian/Pacific Islander

## OUR CLIENTS

11,046 clients assisted

11,307 cases opened

9,285 cases closed

34,068 persons impacted

9,421 children

21,639 adults

3,008 seniors

2,984 clients for whom a translator was provided

28 languages spoken

# DIVERSITY IS OUR STRENGTH



**WALK INTO THE OFFICES OF NORTHEAST NEW JERSEY LEGAL SERVICES** in Jersey City, Paterson, or Hackensack, and you will often hear a flurry of multilingual conversations. It's all part of how our legal services firm responds to the unique needs of our clients.

More than half of the staffers at NNJLS are bilingual, and more than 70% of the staff are people of color, which mirrors the demographics of our coverage area. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, 73% of residents in Hudson County identify as Hispanic, Black, Asian, two or more races, and other minority groups. In Passaic County, 62% identify as people of color, and in Bergen County, 43% of residents do.

Having a diverse staff is crucial as it fosters an environment where new ideas can be explored,

said Executive Director, Leah Ashe, Esq. "With a diverse staff comes diverse perspectives and knowledge, which helps a program like ours grow and move forward," she added.

"With the diverse populations of Hudson, Passaic, and Bergen Counties, the diversity of our staff makes a difference in being able to assist our clients," said Executive Director Leah Ashe. "Many of our staff speak languages other than English, which aids in building trust with our clients and confidence in the work that we do to assist them," Leah said. "When our staff can relate to our clients, it makes for a better experience for all. As a legal services program that provides assistance to an extremely diverse client population, it is essential that our staff reflect the communities we serve."

“As a legal services program that provides assistance to an extremely diverse client population, it is essential that our staff reflect the communities we serve.” – Leah Ashe, Esq., Executive Director

Diversity is absolutely important, especially in the practice of law, said Lisa Fennell, Managing Attorney in the Public Benefits Unit at NNJLS. “People want to see others who look like them,” Lisa said. “They see people who can relate to them, who can speak their language, and it’ll draw them here.”

When there’s a severe problem, as clients of legal services agencies often face, it’s important to have staffers who can work with them and understand their culture, Lisa said.

“I have seen firsthand how much of a difference it makes when a staff member at outreach speaks to a potential client in their own language,” said Laura Arriaza, Community Outreach & Engagement Manager at NNJLS.

“You can visibly notice a calmness come over the client and their walls slowly come down the more and more they speak with the staff member. People feel empowered when they know there are people at NNJLS who look like them and can easily communicate with them. It showcases our commitment to diversity and inclusion.”

NNJLS staff are fluent in languages and dialects including Spanish, Arabic, Hindi, Gujarati, Urdu, French, Portuguese, Korean, and Mandarin, among others. It has been a priority of NNJLS to look for and hire a diverse pool of candidates, Leah said.

It’s been said that diversity is our strength. At NNJLS, that strength moves us forward in our mission of equal justice for all, each and every day.



## NNJLS Practice Areas

# HOUSING UNIT

Fast-paced is how Larry Sindoni, Managing Attorney, NNJLS Housing Unit, describes his unit’s work at NNJLS. With cases such as evictions, Section 8 housing problems, landlord-tenant issues, and more, NNJLS housing attorneys must be nimble, he said.

“It’s very quick,” Larry said. “You have to think on your feet a lot.”

Indeed, the Housing Unit handles a high caseload and is very busy, especially with the COVID-19 pandemic wreaking havoc on family finances. Tenants are being sued for balances owed from the pandemic when they did not have an income, Larry said.

“Many people just can’t afford a lawyer and a lot of times they get bullied by the other side,” he added.

That’s when NNJLS lawyers are able to step in and help.

Larry is a veteran housing attorney with over 25 years of experience at NNJLS. He exudes passion for public interest law as he sees firsthand how solving important problems impacts people’s lives. “We have the expertise—we understand the nuances of the law,” he added.

NNJLS provides legal representation and advice for thousands of housing issues, including evictions, illegal lockouts, utility shutoffs by landlords, foreclosures, and displacements due to fire, flood, or municipal action. NNJLS also helps with other landlord-tenant disputes, including unsafe housing conditions such as broken windows or doors, leaky roofs, lack of heating, or exterminating.

It’s the day-to-day work of the NNJLS housing attorneys that inspires Larry. In many cases, their work can change people’s lives.

“If you get a really good decision and it helps them personally, that means the world to them,” he said. “If you can keep someone housed and they can continue to live where they are—that’s a big deal.”



**LARRY SINDONI**  
Managing Attorney  
NNJLS Housing Unit

NNJLS handled over **4,000** housing cases in 2023, ranging from landlord-tenant issues, to public housing disputes, discrimination, and more.



## NNJLS Practice Areas

# SENIOR UNIT

When it comes to the well-being of our senior clients at NNJLS, Nick Kiriakatos recalls a promise he made to a client.

“I was speaking with a client of mine who asked that I treat his parents as if they were my own grandparents,” Nick said. “That really resonated with me.”

The Senior Unit represents low-income people aged 60 and older for myriad issues, including consumer debt, public benefits, as well as advice and preparation of documents such as Wills and Powers of Attorney.

Nick has a long history of working with seniors—starting when he had just graduated from law school—working in legal services serving in Ocean County, N.J.

As the Managing Attorney of the NNJLS Senior Unit, Nick takes pride in the care and compassion that the attorneys and support staff provide to all of our senior clients.

“The Senior Unit here at NNJLS really connects you with an attorney who cares about your matter,” Nick said. “We take very simple acts that seem like they don’t matter, but they really do matter to our clients. We will often make house visits to help them execute and finalize documents.”

In addition to issues such as Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, housing and SNAP benefits, the Senior Unit also assists with legal remedies to stop the abuse and neglect of seniors, including frauds and scams, domestic violence, and abuse or neglect from a family member.

One of the most popular outreach events is the Make-A-Will sessions where NNJLS attorneys travel to sites to help seniors start the process of drafting a Will, Nick said. That’s one of many ways the Senior Unit is reaching out to the communities we serve.

“During these events, we partner with community organizations and local leaders to go out into the community and speak with clients about drafting their Wills and thinking about their future,” Nick said.

**NICK KIRIAKATOS**  
Managing Attorney  
NNJLS Senior Unit

In 2023,  
NNJLS  
assisted  
**1,099 seniors**  
with a variety  
of legal issues.

## NNJLS Practice Areas

# IMMIGRATION UNIT



**EDGAR ESPINOSA**  
Managing Attorney  
NNJLS Immigration  
Unit

As an immigrant from Colombia, helping other immigrants with his legal expertise is near and dear to Edgar Espinosa’s heart.

“Because I am an immigrant—my mom, my sister and I came here in 1992 when I was 11 years

old—I understand a lot of the things that our clients have gone through,” Edgar said.

Edgar is the Managing Attorney of the Immigration Unit at NNJLS, leading a team of five attorneys and a paralegal. The unit helps low-income immigrants with needs such as adjustment of status, naturalization, family petitions, renewal or replacement of Legal Permanent Resident cards, and visa applications.

The Immigration Unit was created at NNJLS to address the needs of the diverse communities we serve, and the unit continues to grow. “We’re constantly having conversations within our program on how we can expand and how we can maximize our reach,” Edgar said.

Having been through the naturalization process, Edgar empathizes with the clients served by NNJLS. He considers his work as a way of giving back to the community.

“I always wanted to practice immigration law,” Edgar said. “The unit was created. I’m thankful for that.”



In 2023, NNJLS  
helped **1,199 clients**  
with the naturalization  
process and other  
immigration issues.

## NNJLS Practice Areas

# BENEFITS UNIT



**LISA FENNELL**  
Managing Attorney  
NNJLS Benefits Unit

For the past 25 years, Lisa Fennell has been helping community members with public benefits issues at Northeast New Jersey Legal Services. A native of Jersey City, she chose to go into public interest law to help the most vulnerable obtain the legal help they need.

As the Managing Attorney of the Public Benefits Unit at NNJLS, Lisa oversees a team of attorneys

who assist people whose benefits have been denied, terminated, reduced or suspended.

“We’re the clients’ safety net because their benefits are their safety,” Lisa said.

NNJLS Public Benefits lawyers handle myriad issues such as welfare assistance, emergency rental assistance, SNAP (food stamps), Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, SSI, and unemployment benefits.

These benefits are crucially important as they impact the health and well-being of people who may have nowhere else to turn, Lisa said.

“They need food on the table. They need to know where they are going to lay their head,” Lisa said. “It’s so vital for us to serve and advocate for them.”

Lisa has seen many cases throughout the years where families are struggling to meet basic needs while fighting through bureaucracy. That’s when NNJLS can step in.

“My love for the work I do is knowing I’m putting my clients in a much better position than when they came in,” she said.

NNJLS handled **1,939 cases** related to obtaining or maintaining public benefits in 2023.

## NNJLS Practice Areas

# FAMILY UNIT

Dianna Fuller vividly remembers when she helped change her client’s life early in her career. It was a domestic violence case, where a young mother with three young children was trying to escape an abusive partner.

Despite a restraining order, the partner continued to pose a threat, Dianna recalled. He took their children and refused to return them. That’s when Dianna decided to help her client by going to the house with police.

“It dawned on me that this was very serious and I could be seriously injured and this was what she was going through all the time,” Dianna said.

Trying to help survivors of domestic violence get to a safe space is a primary focus of the Family Unit at NNJLS, said Dianna, who is the Managing Attorney. The attorneys in the unit assist with getting final restraining orders for domestic violence clients as well as getting final protective orders for people who have survived sexual assaults, Dianna said.

The unit provides legal representation and advice for issues affecting family and domestic relationships, keeping clients and their families safe.

Additional family issues NNJLS can help with include custody, child support, spousal support, visitation and uncontested divorce.

For survivors of domestic violence, NNJLS can help with relief such as custody, support, and possession of a residence. Other matters include housing, immigration, and federal tax issues, referral to partner agencies for counseling and safety planning and assistance with New Jersey Victims of Crime Compensation claims.

Dianna started her career in family law clerking for a family law judge when she graduated from law school. Having spent her career in family law, Dianna understands the seriousness of the cases the unit handles.

“These are real lives that are being affected,” she said.



**DIANNA FULLER**  
Managing Attorney  
NNJLS Family Unit

NNJLS handled **599 cases** involving domestic violence in 2023.





**ERIN BERMAN**  
Staff Attorney  
NNJLS Education Unit

**NNJLS**  
handled  
**68 education-**  
**related cases**  
in 2023.

**NNJLS Practice Areas**

# EDUCATION REPRESENTATION PROJECT

You could say that education advocacy runs in Erin Berman’s family.

Erin is the granddaughter of a Newark public school teacher with a deep connection to education. Her grandmother was arrested in the Newark teachers’ strike of 1971, when the Newark Teachers Union demanded better education for students.

“She was very committed to forwarding the rights of students in underserved communities,” Erin recalled.

Erin followed in her grandmother’s footsteps and became a teacher. But serving students in other ways piqued her interest.

“I went to school to become a teacher, but after teaching in several urban school districts, I realized the great disparity between educational services in New Jersey,” Erin said. “So I decided to go to law school to address some of those disparities.”

Erin is now a staff attorney in the Education Unit at Northeast New Jersey Legal Services. She represents parents seeking legal help to make sure their children are getting appropriate education services from their school districts.

“A parent could have a variety of issues with the school district,” she said. “These include, but are not limited to, bullying claims, discipline issues, special education, 504 accommodations, attendance issues, or truancy.”

Since starting at NNJLS in January 2024, Erin has seen the number of cases triple in the Education Unit. The connections with other stakeholders and non-profits have been helpful in spreading the word.

“We’re only just beginning to grow this unit,” she said.

**NNJLS Practice Areas**

# VETERANS JUSTICE PROJECT



**JENNA D’ATTILO**  
Staff Attorney  
NNJLS Veterans  
Justice Project

Growing up with her father who served in the Marine Corps during the Vietnam War era, Jenna D’Attilo saw the struggles that he went through as a combat veteran.

“He enlisted when he was only 17,” Jenna said. “When he came back, he had PTSD. Back then it was not something that was talked about or known.”

Jenna’s dad did not get connected with Veterans

Affairs for treatment for decades. It wasn’t until Jenna was in college that he was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. The family finally figured out what was haunting him.

With treatment, Jenna’s father was able to cope with his demons.

“I was able to see how it transformed my father’s life, how it transformed our family’s life,” Jenna said. “That inspired me to use any resources that I could to help the veteran community.”

Jenna now serves as a staff attorney for the Veterans Justice Project at NNJLS where she helps veterans and their families with VA benefits, discharge upgrades, public benefits, and more.

The Veterans Justice Project serves low-income veterans of any age, from recently discharged enlisted personnel to senior citizens, Jenna explained.

As the daughter of a veteran, Jenna understands the challenges veterans face. Now as an attorney, Jenna uses her deep understanding of veterans affairs from a personal and legal perspective to serve those who served our country.



**NNJLS helped 165  
veteran households  
with an array of legal  
issues in 2023.**

## NNJLS Practice Areas

# DISASTER RESPONSE PROJECT



**SOO WOO**  
Managing Attorney  
NNJLS Disaster  
Response Project

It was one of the deadliest storms in New Jersey. Hurricane Ida walloped the state, destroying lives and properties in its path when it made landfall on September 1, 2021. Thirty people died, with the storm resulting in \$20 billion in economic damages.

NNJLS Managing Attorney, Soo Woo Esq., began working on disaster legal relief in March of 2022, attending the Florida Disaster Collaboration Conference in Orlando sponsored by Legal Services of North Florida. With a team of three, including Soo as the supervisor, NNJLS created the disaster outreach plan and went to work.

“We created a flyer about our disaster assistance program in five different languages to distribute at our outreach events,” Soo said.

About 100 clients contacted NNJLS immediately after Hurricane Ida, so the team sent follow-up letters to let them know about the Disaster Response Project, Soo said. As part of our outreach efforts, NNJLS contacted over 60 organizations and gave presentations.

Though it’s been more than two years since Hurricane Ida wreaked havoc in New Jersey, there is still plenty to do. A lot of legal issues can arise out of disasters such as losing documents, housing issues and family issues, Soo said.

“If you’re affected by Ida, we can help. Even if it’s not Ida, if it’s a local disaster, we can help,” Soo said.

“It’s very important for survivors of disasters to seek legal counsel,” Soo added. “Some of the problems will have long-term effects.”

### LEGAL ISSUES THAT MAY ARISE AFTER A DISASTER

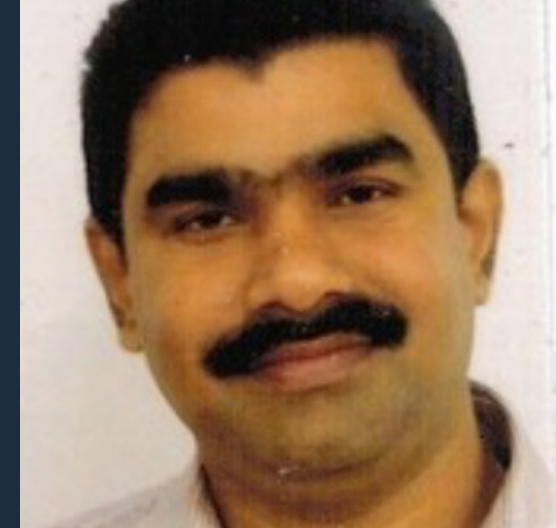
- **Housing Issues:** Renter’s insurance denials, security deposit, unsafe housing conditions, rental assistance, personal property damage, and termination of tenancy.
- **Homeowner Issues:** Insurance denials, FEMA appeals, disaster-related assistance, mortgage, foreclosure, and property title issues.
- **Document Recovery:** Replacing lost government and identification documents; FEMA and other disaster assistance claims, appeals, and recoupment.
- **Insurance:** Denials, disputes of claim amounts, appeals, and settlement negotiation.
- **Public Benefits:** SNAP, unemployment, SBA loans, denial of benefits and appeals, and recoupment.
- **Contractor Fraud:** Avoiding contractor fraud, how to review licenses, permits, and inspection reports.

## NNJLS Practice Areas

# LOW INCOME TAXPAYERS CLINIC

Receiving a letter from the IRS can be very daunting. The Low Income Taxpayers Clinic (LITC) at NNJLS helps low- to moderate-income individuals and families with their IRS tax issues. In 2023, NNJLS assisted more than 200 people with navigating their tax matters by resolving issues related to disputes or controversies, earned income tax credit issues, tax refunds, and stimulus payments.

“We get funding to help low income taxpayers who get notices from the IRS to resolve controversial cases,” said LITC Director Rinu Cherian. “We try to help them. We can file a tax court petition.” Access to legal services for low-income taxpayers is crucial because it ensures that individuals and families who may not have the resources to hire a private attorney still receive the necessary guidance and representation. This support can prevent financial crises, reduce stress, and ensure that taxpayers’ rights are protected, ultimately contributing to their overall financial stability and well-being.



**RINU CHERIAN**  
Director, NNJLS Low Income  
Taxpayers Clinic

NNJLS assisted more than **200 clients** with tax-related issues in 2023.

# PLWHA ADVOCACY PROJECT



NNJLS’s PLWHA Advocacy Project provides comprehensive legal services to hundreds of persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) throughout Bergen and Passaic Counties. Through this project, NNJLS is able to address the unique legal needs that PLWHA might have, especially with regard to medical care, housing, and accessing or maintaining public benefits.

Access to legal services is crucial for people living with HIV/AIDS, as they often face discrimination, complex medical and legal issues, and barriers to essential services. Legal assistance helps ensure that their rights are protected and that they receive the support and resources necessary to maintain their health and stability.



## WORDS OF APPRECIATION

*"He's a top-flight consumer attorney. He knows everything from top to bottom. He comes to me when he has issues about housing law. Sometimes our issues overlap because our clients may want to file for bankruptcy. He's just a great resource whom I would go to if I needed to find something out."*

**GREG DIEBOLD**

NNJLS Director of Litigation who worked with Neil his whole career

*"Neil Fogarty mentored many attorneys through his kind and patient example. He was a fierce and brilliant advocate who shaped New Jersey law to the betterment of consumers across the state."*

**AARON HARMATY**

Staff Attorney

*"He is the best boss I've ever worked for. They don't make attorneys like Neil anymore."*

**HILARY NAT**

Assistant Managing Attorney



## NNJLS Practice Areas

# CONSUMER UNIT

## Happy Retirement Neil Fogarty

Time indeed flies when you love what you do.

After 47 years at NNJLS, Neil Fogarty is retiring as Managing Attorney of the Consumer Unit. Fresh out of New York University Law School in 1977, Neil began his career with Hudson County Legal Services (HCLS) as a staff attorney handling consumer cases. Working in public service law is his passion through and through, from his early days at HCLS to his work at Northeast New Jersey Legal Services serving Hudson, Bergen, and Passaic counties.

Neil's Jersey City office is filled with decades of memories. Alongside his diplomas are calendars with photography by Ansel Adams. They were gifts to him annually from his mother until her passing. A hobby photographer, Neil enjoys scenes of landscapes.

As he reflects on his career at NNJLS, it's the people that Neil will miss most.

"I have been fortunate to work with very fine people who share a commitment to solve problems for poor people," Neil said. "These include our own staff, other New Jersey attorneys and attorneys we met through the National Consumer Law Center."

Throughout his career, Neil has assisted thousands of clients in resolving financial hardships. Some of his cases had a lasting impact, where court decisions changed the law for the better, Neil said.

In 2003, Neil represented a client in *Pulley v. Legriede*, where U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Morris Stern granted summary judgment in favor of the client and discharged motor vehicle charges levied against her by the New Jersey Division of Motor Vehicles. The ruling established that New Jersey insurance surcharges were dischargeable in bankruptcy, which resulted in many motorists regaining their driver's license that was needed to drive to work, Neil said.

Twenty years later, in the 2023 case *Heidt v. BV001 REO Blocker LLC*, Neil successfully represented a client whose home had been lost due to a tax foreclosure. The client argued that he only owed a debt of \$30,540. The Bankruptcy Court returned ownership of the home to the client because the tax foreclosure was a transfer for less than a reasonably equivalent value, and the client became insolvent as a result. The ruling means that the client now has the opportunity to sell the home to recover his \$200,000 home equity, which the speculator's foreclosure had seized. Because of this ruling, our client was able to sell his house, pay all taxes, and recover his \$230,000 equity.

Neil has taken on leadership roles throughout his career, having served as President of the Consumers League of New Jersey and on the Consumer Advocacy Council of The Federal Reserve Board.

In addition to his work representing clients, Neil supervised the Consumer Unit at NNJLS, training a new generation of consumer attorneys.

"Neil Fogarty mentored many attorneys through his kind and patient example," said staff attorney Aaron Harmaty. "He was a fierce and brilliant advocate who shaped New Jersey law to the betterment of consumers across the state."

"He is the best boss I've ever worked for," said attorney manager Hilary Nat. "They don't make attorneys like him anymore."

Much has changed in legal services since Neil started almost five decades ago. "With greater funding, legal services programs grew, expanded, and merged," Neil said. "By securing new grants, NNJLS expanded the services we provide to the client community." As for the future of the Consumer Unit at NNJLS, Neil envisions "a continuation of our tradition of excellence, as we train the next generation of attorneys, case handlers and staff."



# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



“Dianna is my guardian angel. She kept me calm.”

-J.M.

**J.M. WAS JUST 17 YEARS-OLD** when she met her boyfriend. Smitten by his charm, she ended up moving in with him.

That’s when her life became a nightmare as the dark side of his personality emerged. “He would hit me, hide me from friends,” J.M. recalled. “I was very young. I was groomed by him.

“The abuse continued, and due to her unstable relationship with her family, J.M. didn’t have places to turn to. That’s when NNJLS stepped in. J.M. worked with Dianna Fuller, Managing Attorney of the Family Unit, to obtain a permanent restraining order against her partner.”

Dianna is my guardian angel,” J.M. said. “She

kept me calm.” There were several nerve-racking incidents even after J.M. tried to get him out of her life. On one occasion, J.M. found him hiding in her closet.

Working diligently together with Dianna over the course of two years, J.M. was granted a permanent restraining order at a court hearing from the judge overseeing the case. After the order was issued, J.M.’s ex-partner left her alone.

With a second chance, J.M. turned her life around. She has a new apartment, a new boyfriend, and is now working as a bartender.

“It’s like a complete 360,” J.M. said. “Dianna saved me.”

# LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

**AS A SELF-DESCRIBED WORKING CLASS PERSON,** J.S. considers herself fortunate to have purchased a one-bedroom condominium for \$37,000 in Jersey City back in 1992 before the real estate boom. It is her sanctuary and retreat. “I thank God I have it,” J.S. said. “I’m proud of it.”

J.S. prides herself on being self-sufficient and responsible. She always wanted a Last Will and Testament but didn’t think she could afford one on her salary.

She found Northeast New Jersey Legal Services through her senior citizens network and worked

with attorney Josue Madrid on creating a Last Will and Testament.

“He was very patient,” J.S. said of Josue. “He knew the technical and legal issues.”

J.S. said she has never had a high-paying job, but she’s glad she can leave a little something for her niece when she passes.

“I appreciate that this service is provided to seniors like me,” she said. “I have a Will now and that’s what I’m happy about.”



## NNJLS Programs and Practice Areas

### Housing

Unlawful evictions, landlord-tenant disputes, and other legal issues that threaten housing stability.

### Public Benefits

Unfair denial of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and other benefits that support basic needs, including food stamps, disability, and unemployment.

### Family Law

Custody, child support, and other issues affecting families.

### Consumer Protection

Bankruptcy, clearing criminal records, identity theft, and deceptive lending and sales practices.

### Federal Tax Issues

**(Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic)**  
Resolving unpaid tax and other IRS issues.

### Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault

Restraining orders and other civil legal matters that affect survivors' safety and security.

### Senior Law

Civil legal issues affecting seniors including housing, consumer, Social Security and Medicaid matters, and powers of attorney, as well as elder abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation.

### Education

School registration, special education, and disability accommodations.

### Immigration

U.S. Citizenship, renewal of permanent residency, and other issues related to immigration status for legal permanent residents.

### PLWHA Advocacy Project

Legal services addressing the needs of persons living with HIV and AIDS, including preventing discrimination in housing, employment, and access to services.

### Disaster Assistance

Legal issues including contractor scams, unsafe housing, and denial of disaster-related benefits.

### Veterans

Service-connected disability claims, appeals, and increases; discharge upgrades and DD-214 corrections; VA healthcare access; applications and appeals for other VA benefits, including aid-and-attendance, pensions, and survivor's benefits.



## PRO BONO PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT



**AILI C. MONAHAN, ESQ.**

*Director  
NNJLS PBPP*

### IN 2023, THERE WERE MANY NEW CHANGES AT THE PRO BONO PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT

(PBPP) at NNJLS. In April 2023, we welcomed Aili C. Monahan, Esq., as Director of PBPP. Combining her background in litigation and appellate work, with her passion for public interest in New Jersey, Aili brought a renewed vision and energy to PBPP. Also joining the PBPP team were a new Coordinating Attorney, Program Manager, and designated County Coordinators. PBPP is delighted to have a strong, solid team supporting our clients through pro bono as we close another year.

PBPP continues to provide free legal services to clients through traditional one-to-one

representation with volunteer attorneys and through various legal clinics. Through our partnerships with local, regional and national law firms, PBPP assists clients in preparing pro se documents to assist with legal issues involving safe housing conditions, return of security deposits, applications for naturalization, filing for uncontested divorce, and expungements. PBPP also assists clients with filing for Chapter 7 bankruptcy through a network of experienced bankruptcy attorneys.

2023 also saw an expansion to the pro bono network, including the involvement of numerous new law firms and volunteer attorneys, who support both existing pro bono work, as well as new clinics, including expungements and wills. PBPP works with all of the substantive units at NNJLS to provide legal support to our clients, and also works with the Outreach, Development and Communications to collaborate on projects and goals that further the mission and goals of NNJLS.

PBPP is thrilled with all it accomplished in 2023 and looks forward to continued growth and expansion in 2024.



**Robert (Bob) Farrington, Esq.**, Executive Director, Assistant General Counsel at JPMorgan Chase was selected as the 2023-2024 JPMorgan Chase Legal Pro Bono Fellow, affording him the ability to spend six months working full-time with PBPP. Starting in October 2023, Bob focused his fellowship on recruiting new volunteer attorneys and developing attorney-training materials for volunteers to utilize in a few core legal areas. A long-standing volunteer with PBPP, Bob has consistently demonstrated his commitment and legal acumen by participating in numerous legal clinics over the years with JPMorgan Chase. We thank Bob and JPMorgan Chase for supporting PBPP.

# NNJLS OUTREACH

“As a nonprofit, it is imperative to show people that we are a community-based organization. We are here to serve.” -Laura Arriaza

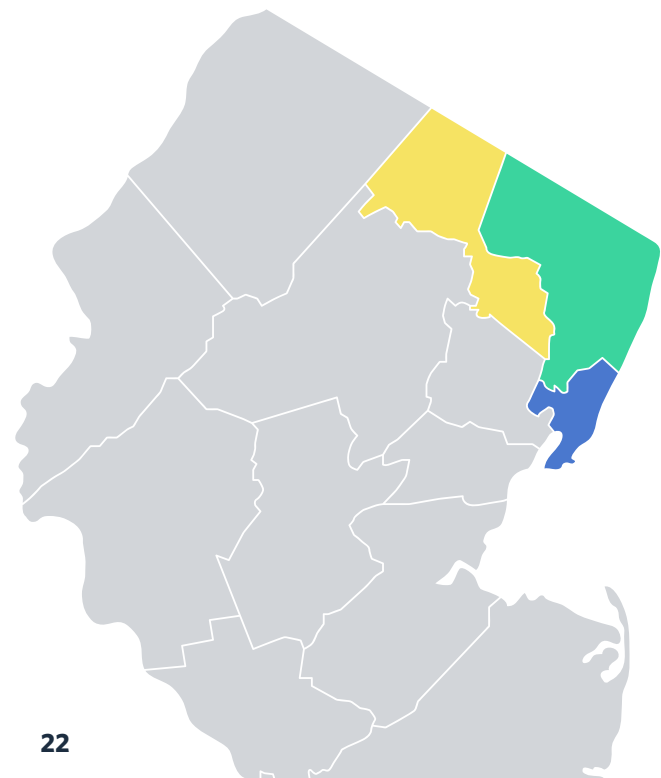
Community outreach and engagement is at the core of implementing the mission of Northeast New Jersey Legal Services. The Community Legal Education Program educates the public on their civil rights and responsibilities while making meaningful connections with potential clients. We value the relationships we build with our community partners and the larger community.

In 2023, NNJLS conducted about 20-30 outreach activities each month that resulted in case referrals. Our staff attorneys consistently present “Know Your Rights” workshops to show the public that we are here for them while providing essential information about the law.

As a nonprofit, it is imperative to show people

that we are a community-based organization. We are here to serve, educate, and provide high-quality legal representation to the most vulnerable in our society.

Community legal education and outreach are crucial for lower-income community members because they often face significant barriers to accessing legal information and services. By providing education and outreach, we empower these individuals with the knowledge they need to protect their rights, navigate legal challenges, and access the resources available to them. This proactive approach helps prevent legal issues from escalating and promotes a more just and equitable society.



## Outreach in 2023

Number of Attendees	Number of Events
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bergen: 2,156</li> <li>Hudson: 2,574</li> <li>Passaic: 1,947</li> <li>Virtual: 2,796</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bergen: 74</li> <li>Hudson: 103</li> <li>Passaic: 111</li> <li>Virtual: 169</li> </ul>
<b>Grand Total: 9,275</b>	<b>Grand Total: 457</b>



Our popular **Make-A-Will events** help seniors start the process of creating a Will. These events are highly popular, and NNJLS is the only legal services program in New Jersey offering this unique service.

Our attorneys and support staff **visit community centers, churches, libraries, food pantries, and health centers** to reach clients where they live. Reaching clients where they live ensures that everyone can access legal help despite any barriers they may face.

NNJLS traveled to **448 events** in 2023, impacting more than **9,200 residents**, and we plan to grow in 2024!



## OUR FUNDING PARTNERS

Without the generosity and support of our funding partners, our work would not be possible:

Bergen County Division of Community Development	Internal Revenue Service, Low Income Taxpayer Clinic Program	Pro Bono Innovation Fund of Legal Services Corporation	State Of New Jersey, Office of Victim-Witness Advocacy
Bergen County Division of Senior Services	Jersey City Department of Community Development	State of New Jersey, Department of Law and Public Safety	The IOLTA Fund of the Bar of New Jersey
City of Paterson, Ryan White Program	Legal Services Corporation	State of New Jersey, Department of the Treasury	United States Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women
Hudson County Division of Community Development	Passaic County Department of Senior Services		United States Department of Veterans Affairs
Hudson County Office on Aging			

## PRO BONO LAW FIRMS/LEGAL PARTNERS

Archer & Greiner P.C.	McCalla Raymer Leibert Pierce LLC	Scura Wigfield Heyer Stevens & Cammarota LLP	Stephen Hunter, Esq., Office of the Public Defender
Cooley LLP	McCarter & English LLP	Seton Hall University School of Law, Center for Social Justice	Tamra Katcher, Esq., Faugno Weis Katcher Daurte, LLC
DLA Piper	Parker Ibrahim & Berg		
Greenberg Traurig LLP	Perkins Coie LLP		
JPMorgan Chase	Rutgers Law School		

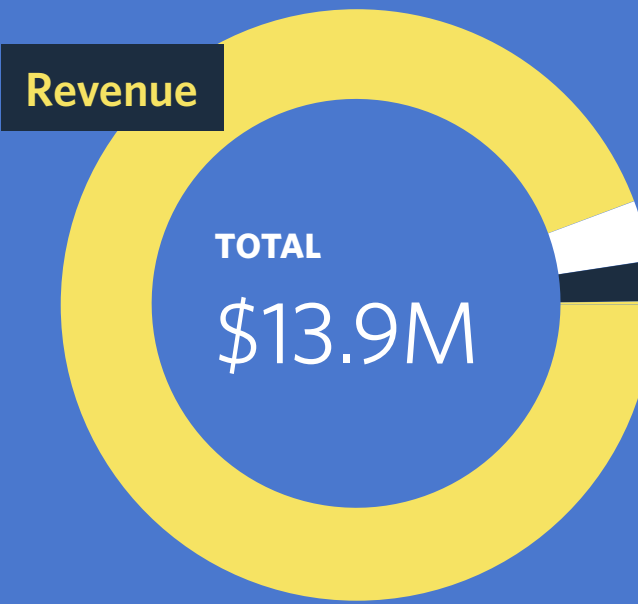
## PRO BONO IN-HOUSE VOLUNTEERS/ CLINIC VOLUNTEERS

Conrado Arroyo, Esq.	Bob Farrington, Esq.	Georgene Panza, Esq.	Fumiko Takada, Esq.
Stefania Arroyo, Esq.	William McInerney, Esq.	David Stevens, Esq.	Noah Zakim, Esq.

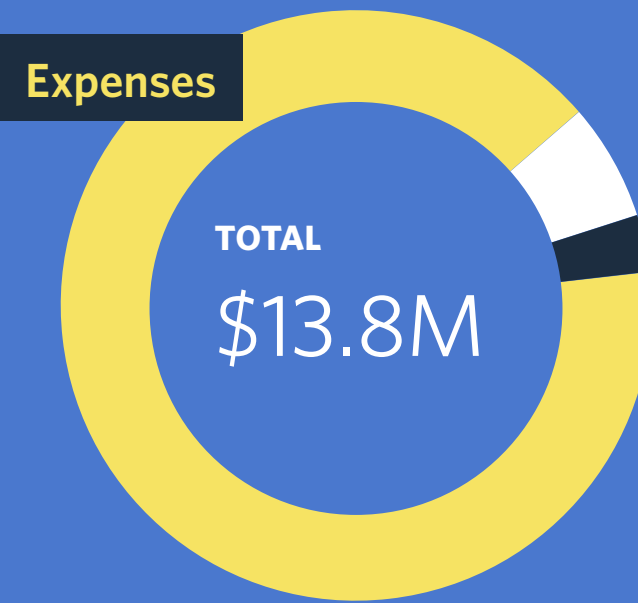
## OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Bergen County Division of Child Care Resources	GBCA Headstart	New Jersey Reentry Corporation	Passaic County Surrogate's Court
Bergen Family Center	Hackensack Meridian Hospital-Community Health Program	New York Historical Society Museum and Library	Passaic County Domestic & Sexual Violence Center
Center for Food Action	Helping Hands Food Pantry of Teaneck	North Bergen Free Public Library	Paterson K-12 School District
Clifton Health Department	Hoboken Public Library	North Hudson Community Action Corp.	Renew Life Center
CUMAC - An Anti-Hunger Organization	Hoboken Shelter	Oasis - A Haven for Women and Children	Saint Matthews Lutheran Church
Franciscan Community Development Center	Hudson County Courts	Passaic County Ombudsman	Triangle Park Community Center
Greater Bergen Community Action	Hudson Pride Center		WomenRising
	Jersey City Free Public Library		

# 2023 FINANCIAL STATEMENT



<b>96%</b>	<b>Government Grants</b> .....	\$13,312,045
<b>2.2%</b>	<b>Donated Services</b> .....	\$309,400
<b>1.5%</b>	<b>Public Contributions</b> .....	\$194,107
<b>&gt;1%</b>	<b>Program Revenues</b> .....	\$50,286



<b>89.9%</b>	<b>Program Services</b> .....	\$12,383,701
<b>7.1%</b>	<b>Administration/General</b> .....	\$971,941
<b>3%</b>	<b>Development/ Fundraising</b> .....	\$417,731

**LSC** | America's Partner  
for Equal Justice  
LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

Northeast New Jersey Legal Services is proud to be a Legal Services Corporation (LSC) grantee, and we comply with all LSC conditions and prohibitions in acceptance of all funds.

## NNJLS Board of Directors

Jack Jay Wind, *President*  
 Norman I. Klein, Esq., *Vice President*  
 Richard A. Herman, Esq., *Treasurer*  
 Christina S. Cooper, Esq., *Secretary*

### BERGEN

Ms. Khitam Ayoub  
 Yongmoon Kim, Esq.  
 Sandra Robinson, Esq.  
 Ms. Barbara Steed

### HUDSON

Ms. Rhetta D. Aleong  
 Ms. Glenda G. Blakely  
 Leonard B. Cohen, Esq.  
 Linda Foster, Esq.  
 Brian Freeman, Esq.  
 Ms. Erin Michaels  
 Ivan H. Sutherland, Esq.  
 Barry Sarkisian, Esq.

### PASSAIC

Conrado Arroyo, Esq.  
 Ms. Cassandra Freeman  
 Jawanza Phoenix, Esq.  
 Ms. Sheryll Thompson



## Executive Leadership and Departments

Leah B. Ashe, *Executive Director*  
 Gregory Diebold, *Director of Litigation*  
 Catherine Rivera, *Director of Operations*  
 Anna P. Navatta, *Director of Community Relations*  
 Elliston Panton, *Director of Finance*  
 Edgar Espinosa, *Deputy Director*



### LEGAL UNITS

**Consumer Unit**  
 Hilary Nat, *Assistant Managing Attorney*

**Family Unit**  
 Dianna Fuller, *Managing Attorney*

**Housing Unit**  
 Lawrence Sindoni, *Managing Attorney*

**Public Benefits Unit**  
 Lisa Fennell, *Managing Attorney*

**Immigration Unit**  
 Edgar Espinosa, *Managing Attorney*

**Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic**  
 Rinu Cherian, *Director*

**Pro Bono Partnerships Project**  
 Aili Monahan, *Director*

### DEPARTMENTS

**Development**  
 Joseph Calaceto, *Director*

**Community Outreach and Engagement**  
 Laura Arriaza, *Manager*

**Communications**  
 Mary Chao, *Manager*



**Northeast New Jersey Legal Services (NNJLS)**'s mission is to ensure equal access to justice for low-income residents of Bergen, Hudson, and Passaic Counties in New Jersey. We believe that no one should be denied a meaningful opportunity to have their day in court simply because they cannot afford a lawyer.

### **Bergen County**

190 Moore Street, Suite 100  
Hackensack, NJ 07601  
(201) 487-2166

### **Hudson County**

574 Summit Avenue  
Jersey City, NJ 07306  
(201) 792-6363

### **Passaic County**

100 Hamilton Plaza, Suite 200  
Paterson, NJ 07505  
(973) 523-2900

[NortheastNJLegalServices.org](https://www.NortheastNJLegalServices.org)

✉ [nnjls@lsnj.org](mailto:nnjls@lsnj.org)

📷 [@NortheastNJLegalServices](https://www.instagram.com/NortheastNJLegalServices)

📘 [NortheastNJLegalServices](https://www.facebook.com/NortheastNJLegalServices)

