

NEW JERSEY'S LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAMS CELEBRATE 40th ANNIVERSARY

The Legal Services system of New Jersey celebrated its 40th anniversary at a reception and dinner on November 29, 2006, at the Hyatt Regency in New Brunswick. A record number—545—registered to attend the event, which featured addresses by Deborah T. Poritz, the retiring Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court, and James R. Zazzali, the new Chief Justice. A new video on the mission and work of Legal Services in New Jersey was also shown for the first time.

The program opened with introductions and welcoming remarks from De Miller, LSNJ President; James H. Coleman, Jr., Chair of the LSNJ Board of Trustees; and Wayne J. Positan, President of the New Jersey State Bar Association, who began by saying that “the New Jersey State Bar Association is proud of its continuing excellent relationship with Legal Services of New Jersey, and equally proud that many New Jersey lawyers have helped Legal Services in its representation of the poor.” Noting that “Over the past 40 years, it has been the mission of Legal Services to ensure that the rights of the poor are not forgotten, and that justice truly is available to all, and dispensed with an even hand,” he concluded by saying, “The State Bar Association salutes your dedication and work over the last 40 years, and we’ll be there for you to support you in addressing the challenges of the years to come.”

Because of an unexpected visit with the troops in the Middle East, Governor Corzine was unable to speak at the Anniversary Dinner as planned. Kenneth Zimmerman, Chief Counsel to the Governor, spoke on his behalf, saying that the Governor had asked him “to communicate two messages. First, he wanted me to recognize and thank New Jersey Legal Services, and all of you who support it, for the

work you do to provide critically-needed legal services for New Jersey's most vulnerable people and communities. The second message—and it's a message that's equally important—is to emphasize how much farther we must go to make equal justice under law more than an unrealized aspiration.”

“Governor Corzine and this administration,” Zimmerman continued, “are proud and deeply respectful of your work, and recognize that Legal Services is the key element in the State's legal assistance system, an organization that's indispensable to the overall provision of civil justice in New Jersey. At the same time, the Governor asked me to stress ...the distance we still must travel to make the aspiration represented by Legal Services into a reality for all the people of New Jersey. In this regard, the facts are stunning Four out of five poor people who need a lawyer don't have access to one. Phrased another way, while there is a private attorney for one out of every 200 individuals in New Jersey who are not low-income, there is only one Legal Services lawyer for every 6,500 low-income people. Simply put, we cannot accept this. We must do better. Governor Corzine and I are committed to working with you to address this justice gap.”

Concluding, Zimmerman said, “Tonight, we celebrate 40 years of New Jersey Legal Services' great good work. It is appropriate to thank all of you, leaders, lawyers, staff, who, like, Legal Services' clients, frequently go unrecognized.... This evening also serves to push us to take measure of how far we all still must go. Whether we serve in government, work in private firms, or are in a position to contribute to our communities in any other capacity, our goal must be to assure that all of us have equal access to justice and full opportunity to participate in the promise offered by New Jersey and this nation.

On Governor Corzine's behalf, I congratulate all of you on your successes and thank you for your partnership."

After dinner and the showing of the new video, entitled "Just Justice," first the recently-retired Chief Justice Poritz, then the new Chief Justice Zazzali, offered their remarks, which are presented in full below. De Miller concluded the program with some final words. "For 35 years," he said, "it has been my privilege to work for, and lead, this organization. I would agree with Plato that it is a fundamental instinct of human beings to love and seek justice. To be paid to quest for greater justice is a special blessing indeed."

"Tonight, and this year," Miller continued, "we celebrate 40 years of achievements of an institution, Legal Services, whose sole mission every day is simply to seek justice for those who are most disadvantaged, the individuals and communities we represent: simple justice, sweet justice, social and economic justice, legal justice. The characteristics of the most disadvantaged may change over time.... But beneath those temporal changes, there is one unifying characteristic, sadly: the most disadvantaged, the most oppressed, are almost always living in deep poverty. So, Legal Services, joining hands with others in this state and nation, tries to address this poverty. That's what we do."

Concluding, Miller said, "as we gird ourselves for the road ahead, and with fortune, another five and 10 years' celebration, let's resolve, as a first priority, to join with Ken and his words on behalf of the Governor, to close and end New Jersey's justice gap.... To guide us, I would offer three of the guiding precepts in my own life. To paraphrase, first, Robert F. Kennedy, who in turn was paraphrasing Aeschylus: 'Some see things as they are and ask, 'Why?' Some see things as they ought to be, and ask, 'Why

not?’’ And then, second, to paraphrase the Talmudic scholar, Hillel, who concluded his moving incantation with, ‘If not now, when?’ And finally, Learned Hand, ‘The poor are waiting.’’’