

# and Justice for All

Volunteer Lawyers  
for Justice  
Taking Cases. Changing Lives.

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION

## A Message from the Executive Director



Hello VLJ friends,

As we draw to the close of 2021, it's a good time to take stock of what VLJ has accomplished during our 20-year history. Michael Griffinger, Susan Feeney, and Maureen McCully Winograd were visionaries, who in 2001 could see the power of collaboration between legal services and the private bar, and helped to found our organization. Recently, I had dinner with Karen Sacks, VLJ's founding executive director, and Kaleia Edmundo, VLJ's first legal assistant (and later, VLJ staff attorney). I love listening to the stories of the two of them together in a small office calling VLJ's 30 volunteers to "take a case and change a life."

Fast forward 20 years, and VLJ now has 21 staff people reaching out to our panel of more than 1,700 volunteers. While we use many different technologies today, including virtual legal clinics, we still make a good amount of old-fashioned phone calls to lawyers, asking them to help our clients in need. In the words of a veteran recently helped by VLJ, "People like me with no financial resources need services like VLJ to help advise how to go about legal issues...I had nowhere else to turn. It's a blessing to have been able to get in touch with VLJ."

During a season when I reflect upon my blessings, I am so thankful for this community that our founders started. Because of the thousands of volunteers, donors, trustees, and staff who have worked with our clients and financially supported our mission, we have moved the needle of justice to help those living in poverty. Thank you for your gift of time, your gift of treasure, and your gift of justice.

I wish you and your loved ones a very happy holiday season.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ashley Keenan". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a black rectangular background.

[P.S. Check out this great graphic of a few of VLJ's milestones over the past 20 years!](#)

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**Congratulations to Sam Della Fera, Jr. & the Audible Legal Team!**



Congratulations to New Jersey State Bar Association pro bono award winners Sam Della Fera, Jr. and the legal team at Audible for their exemplary pro bono leadership.

In his accomplished 28-year legal career, Sam Della Fera, Jr. has counseled clients in the areas of commercial litigation, bankruptcy, and debtor and creditor rights. Sam has been one of VLJ's longest-standing volunteers, helping countless people with bankruptcy issues, mentoring less experienced volunteers, and assisting VLJ staff on complex legal issues.

Audible's legal department is committed to assisting and empowering underserved communities in New Jersey, stemming from Audible's corporate-wide mission to advance equality, racial justice and economic empowerment. Audible has been an essential partner to VLJ's ReLeSe program and is working on criminal record clearing issues leading families in Essex County to greater employment and family stability.

Thank you to Sam and the entire team at Audible for being champions of justice in New Jersey!

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## December Volunteer of the Month: Denise Dimson Rekem



We are honored to recognize Denise Dimson Rekem, a longtime volunteer with VLJ's Children's Representation Program (CRP) as December's Volunteer of the Month. Denise is a founding member of [Parles Rekem LLP](#), where she focuses her practice on the representation of individuals with special needs and their families in the areas of special education, transition and adult services, residential placements, guardianships, bullying and discipline.

Denise is a passionate advocate and strongly believes that access to legal services should not be dependent on income. Denise has been a volunteer with VLJ for six years and has devoted more than 140 pro bono hours to representing parents of children with disabilities in their special education and guardianship matters.

[Read Denise's Full Feature Here!](#)

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## VLJ's 20th Anniversary Gala Was a Smashing Success!

While VLJ's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Arts & Eats for Justice Gala wasn't the anniversary party we had imagined when the year started, it was an enormous success thanks to our generous sponsors, ticket buyers, ad sponsors, and friends. On October 20, 2021, over 300 people gathered virtually to celebrate VLJ and our 2021 honorees: Former US Attorney General, Loretta Lynch, Merck & Co., Inc., and VLJ's Founding Executive Director, Karen Sacks.

Karen Sacks said, "VLJ has impacted the lives of tens of

thousands and I am so proud to have played an integral role. I congratulate VLJ on 20 extraordinary years."

Merck's Executive Vice President, General Counsel, and Corporate Secretary Jennifer Zachary, who accepted the award for Merck, said, "We love that we have been able to partner with VLJ to help people truly access justice."

In her keynote acceptance speech, Loretta Lynch said, "The work that VLJ does is important because it deals with making the promise of America real for those who only seem to bear the burdens of America. For 20 years VLJ has been a guide for so many facing housing, food, and economic insecurity. I thank Volunteer Lawyers for Justice for the work that it has done and the work it continues to do."

Thanks to our incredible supporters, VLJ raised over \$700,000 to continue our vital legal programs. Thank you so much for partnering in justice with us.



## Gifts Update!

Thank you to the foundations, companies, and major donors who made recent gifts to VLJ. The funds provided by the entities below are essential to the daily of operation of VLJ and enable us to ensure that justice is available to people experiencing poverty.



The Estate of  
Robert H. Arnow

Bershad  
Family Foundation



David Tepper  
Foundation



# Welcome New Team Members!

We're very excited to welcome this talented trio to the VLJ team!

Katiana Guerrier is a recent graduate of William Patterson University and comes to VLJ with great office experience and a passion for the law. Katiana has joined the team as a legal assistant.

Eilleen Ingram-Willis comes to VLJ with extensive legal experience at the Jersey City Housing Authority and Central Jersey Legal Services. She is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and Rutgers University School of Law. Eilleen joined VLJ as a managing attorney and will lead the New Jersey Human Trafficking Victims' Legal Assistance Program and the South Ward Promise Neighborhood PROGRAM.

Anne Kassalow is a skilled legal services litigator having served as a staff attorney at Northeast New Jersey Legal Services. Anne is a graduate of the University of Maryland and Seton Hall University School of Law. Anne has joined VLJ as a staff attorney for the Tenancy Program.

Use the links below to find out more!



[Katiana Guerrier](#)



[Eilleen Ingram-Willis](#)



[Anne Kassalow](#)

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## Program Spotlight: Tenancy Program

VLJ's Tenancy Program underwent a substantial expansion in 2021. Thanks to funding from the New Jersey Pandemic Relief Fund, VLJ added four new staff attorneys to assist New Jersey tenants facing eviction. Thankfully the NJPRF and Tepper Foundation provided funding for the expanded program to remain in place through the end of 2022, providing tenants with access to vital legal services as the eviction moratorium and other protections end.

During the summer, VLJ also became a legal services partner on the newly-created Access to Counsel pilot program funded by the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs. This initiative provides legal and social services to low-income tenants facing eviction in East Orange, Trenton, and Atlantic City. In addition to individual client advocacy, Tenancy Program staff took a leading role on broader advocacy initiatives with a more far-reaching impact, including:

- Advocating with Attorney General Grewal regarding illegal lockouts of tenants, which resulted in the AG issuing a directive to police regarding their duties in these matters, and leading a virtual town hall (including Lt. Governor Oliver and VLJ's Jessica Kitson) to call attention to the issue.
- Preparing and submitting written comments to the court's recommendation to overhaul landlord-tenant procedures, and delivering testimony at the Court's rule hearing held in



June.

- Meeting with court staff, legislators, and agency personnel about implementation of the court's new landlord-tenant procedures and the new tenant protection laws that went into effect earlier this year.

As we look ahead, the Tenancy Program is gearing up for a busy 2022 and are always looking for new volunteers! If you want to get involved, or learn more about our work/trainings please submit a [volunteer form](#)!

[Volunteer Form](#)

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## In Other News

In case you missed it, check out recent media coverage of our work.



### Housing Q&A: What does the end of NJ's eviction moratorium..

Once Jan. 1, 2022, hits, New Jersey's eviction moratorium expires. But what exactly does that mean?

[Read more](#)

[www.northjersey.com](http://www.northjersey.com)

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## Follow us on LinkedIn

VLJ is on LinkedIn, and we look forward to connecting with you! Stay up-to-date on networking events and trainings hosted by VLJ, learn from our staff about the issues impacting our client communities, and hear from VLJ staff



and volunteers about why they are so committed to justice. [Connect with us by clicking here!](#)

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Help ensure access to justice by donating today!