

# and Justice for All

Volunteer Lawyers  
for Justice  
Taking Cases. Changing Lives.

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION

## From the Executive Director



Hello VLJ friends,

What a difference a year makes! A couple of weeks ago, VLJ hosted our annual Summer Soiree. Emeritus Trustee Michael Griffinger not only hosted the event at Mountain Ridge Country Club, but he also claimed responsibility for the perfect summer weather. It was an event that was filled with joy, as colleagues and co-workers saw each other in-person for the first time in over a year. And let's not forget: there was laughter, smiles, and hugs.

While the evening was a joyful celebration, we also discussed the needs of our neighbors who live in poverty and are still reeling from the wake left by COVID-19. VLJ's young professionals' committee, Generation Now, focused on employability issues and issued a call to action to help people restore their driving privileges.

Did you drive anywhere today? Imagine if you were prohibited from driving. What would be more difficult? Getting to work? Getting to the doctor? Getting a child to school? Quick and easy tasks take significantly more time and more planning. The reality is that driver's licenses are important to most of us, and vital to employment in New Jersey. They are also very easy to lose, especially if you are Black, Brown, or poor. We have had clients who have lost their licenses due to unpaid parking tickets—which has a lot more to do with poverty than road safety. In New Jersey, 42% of people lost their job after their driver's license was suspended.

So, the Generation Now Committee is calling on you to help people get back to work after COVID-19. If you are a lawyer, you can [sign up for a CLE](#) to learn how to take on low-stakes litigation with a huge impact. If you aren't a lawyer, but want to volunteer, we have [many opportunities to get involved](#) with VLJ's legal work. Or you can help us by [making a financial donation](#) to support our mission.

All of us at VLJ are preparing for the cascading waves of legal issues that will wash over our state when the eviction moratorium is lifted later this year. I am heartened by VLJ's tremendous community of advocates and supporters. Thank you all for creating a more just New Jersey! And please, more laughter, smiles, and hugs.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cathy Keenan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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## VLJ Welcomes new Board Trustee Maritza Rodriguez

Maritza Rodriguez began her family law practice in 2012.

Shortly after in 2013, she became an active volunteer with VLJ's child support and Divorce Programs. Maritza has dedicated her career to serving the most vulnerable among us -not only assisting hundreds of pro se litigants with their legal needs, but also taking on complicated pro bono cases for full representation. As we continue our mission to improve litigants' access to justice in New Jersey, we are truly fortunate to have such a powerful ally join our governing board. With great pleasure, we welcome our newest board trustee, Maritza Rodriguez.



## Arts & Eats for Justice Gala 2021

YOU ARE INVITED

### ARTS & EATS FOR JUSTICE



### VOLUNTEER LAWYERS FOR JUSTICE

JOIN VLJ AT ARTS & EATS FOR JUSTICE  
A CELEBRATION OF 20 YEARS OF SERVICE

*Wednesday, October 20th, 2021*

5:30 - 9 PM

HONORING



**LORETTA E. LYNCH**

Former U.S. Attorney General  
Partner, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP

**KAREN SACKS**

VLJ Founding Executive Director

## July 2021 Volunteer of the Month: Diane Claussen



We are excited to recognize and honor Diane Claussen, a longtime volunteer with VLJ's Debt Relief Legal Program (DRLP). Diane is a Case Manager at Lowenstein Sandler LLP, primarily supporting its bankruptcy practice with chapter 11 filings, creditor committee work, and bankruptcy litigation. Diane first started volunteering with VLJ over a decade ago, when Lowenstein partnered with another major VLJ supporter, Merck, to provide chapter 7 bankruptcy services to VLJ's clients.

[Read More About Diane's Volunteerism Here!](#)

## 2021 Summer Soiree Recap



Thank you to all who helped make VLJ's Summer Soiree on June 23rd such a success. The Soiree, presented by Pro Bono Strategies, was our first in-person event since November 2019! Over 100 attorneys and friends gathered at the Mountain Ridge Country Club to celebrate our work to provide free legal services to those in need and to raise over \$35,000 for the organization.

Hosted by the Generation Now Committee, VLJ's young professionals board, the event featured speeches from VLJ's Executive Director Cathy Keenan and sponsor Stacey Slater of Pro Bono Strategies. Stefanie, a former VLJ client, also shared her

story: Her neurodivergent son's needs were not being met in a virtual setting, and he was falling behind in school. VLJ took her case and connected her with volunteer attorney Robyn Wapner, who donated over 120 hours to help Stefanie and reach a favorable outcome for her son. Stefanie encouraged the attorneys present to volunteer with VLJ, saying, "I do hope that many of you join VLJ's notable mission and vision; it really is a life changing organization."

Special thanks to our title sponsor, Pro Bono Strategies; our underwriters David Bershada and Michael Griffinger; and our sponsors: AT&T; Counsel Press; Duane Morris; George Holland; McCarter & English; Peapack-Gladstone Bank; Price, Meese, Shulman & D'Arminio; Prudential, RBC Wealth Management, and Veritext.

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## Welcome to the Team Rebecca & AJ



VLJ welcomes Rebecca Kucker to our tenancy team! Rebecca is from Long Island, NY and attended Hunter College and The City University of New York School of Law. Rebecca says, "I knew I wanted to work in tenancy after reading *Evicted* by Matthew Desmond. After one conversation with Cathy and Jessica, I knew this would be the perfect place to pursue that work." Fun fact: Rebecca has a deep love for travel and exploration. She has traveled to 46 countries and can't wait to add to that list.



We welcome Augustine Ahiabor (AJ) to the new role of VLJ's Bershada Communications Fellow. AJ attended Montclair State University where he earned a bachelors in English and a K-12 teaching certification. He then went on to earn a masters in business communications from Rider University. AJ says, "After reading the description of the Bershada Communications Fellow position, it was obvious I was being presented with an opportunity to apply my skills to a worthy cause. I'm happy to join and look forward to supporting VLJ's mission. Fun fact: AJ canvassed for Mayor Ras Baraka during his 2010 campaign to represent the South Ward on the Newark City Council.

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# Grants Update

VLJ would like to recognize the support of these tremendous foundations that made grants to VLJ this quarter. Because of their efforts, VLJ will be able to amplify the voices of thousands of people in the legal system.



\$5,000 —ReLeSe Program

The Hyde & Watson Foundation

\$9,000 —Operations



\$15,000 —Tenancy Program



\$50,000 — Unrestricted



\$9,000 —Children's Representation Program



\$26,000 —Veterans Program



\$20,000 —Children's Representation Program

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## In Other News

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



### Mandatory NJ landlord-tenant settlements will....

A version of this article appeared on njherald.com. By Ashley Balcerzak. Renters in New Jersey are still protected against lockouts through



### New Jersey Supreme Court to Begin...

New Jersey's Supreme Court has ordered mandatory settlement



### Volunteer Lawyers for Justice raise...

On June 23, Volunteer Lawyers for Justice held its annual Summer Soiree at Mountain Ridge Country Club in West Caldwell. After shifting to

the end of the year, but starting this month, courts will require mandatory settlement hearings for...

[Read more](http://www.vljnj.org)  
[www.vljnj.org](http://www.vljnj.org)

hearings in pending landlord-tenant cases and said renters who fail to show up will face an eviction order. Chief Justice Stuart Rabner's Friday order...

[Read more](http://www.vljnj.org)  
[www.vljnj.org](http://www.vljnj.org)

a completely virtual service model last year, the soiree was VLJ's first in-person event since the

[Read more](http://www.nj.com)  
[www.nj.com](http://www.nj.com)



## Follow us on LinkedIn

VLJ is on LinkedIn, and we look forward to connecting with you! Stay up to date on networking events and CLE trainings hosted by VLJ, learn from our staff on the issues impacting our client communities, and hear from VLJ staff, volunteers, and board members about what makes VLJ a great organization to be involved with. Connect with us NOW by clicking the logo below! [Follow VLJ on LinkedIn](#)

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**Consider becoming a supporter of VLJ's work!**