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Northeast New Jersey Legal Services Announces New Executive Director, Leah Ashe

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Jersey City, NJ – **Northeast New Jersey Legal Services** (NNJLS) announced today the appointment of Leah B. Ashe, Esq., as its new Executive Director. Ms. Ashe is an accomplished and dynamic lawyer who has played key leadership roles at NNJLS. She succeeds John J. Fitzgerald, Esq., who will be retiring after serving as Executive Director for more than 15 years.

Ms. Ashe has served as the Deputy Director for NNJLS since 2014 and is also the Managing Attorney for the public benefits unit and the Hudson County office. She will begin in her new role on August 1, 2022.

“We are thrilled to appoint Ms. Ashe as NNJLS’s next Executive Director,” said Jack J. Wind, Esq., Board Chair of NNJLS. “She brings extensive experience, natural leadership, and a deep commitment to the communities we serve. I can think of no one better to guide this organization in the next phase of its work,” said Mr. Wind. Ms. Ashe was chosen after an exhaustive nationwide search earlier this year.

Dawn K. Miller, Esq., President of Legal Services of New Jersey added: “On behalf of Legal Services in New Jersey, we congratulate Leah Ashe on her new role as Director of Northeast New Jersey Legal Services and extend our deepest gratitude to her predecessor, Jack Fitzgerald, for his decades of service to the program and our collective statewide system. We are proud and pleased that Leah, a long-time, devoted, and highly accomplished Legal Services advocate, will be assuming this role. Leah has dedicated her career to public service, serving low-income New Jerseyans via our statewide Legal Services system for close to twenty-five years. We are confident that her experience, leadership, compassion,



and commitment to our clients, community, and mission are an asset to all. She has the full support of the statewide New Jersey Legal Services network.”

Ms. Ashe’s impressive resume reflects a career spent building effective partnerships and developing strategic initiatives, particularly in her work to reach underserved and vulnerable communities in the NNJLS catchment area. She joined the organization in 1998 as a Staff Attorney for the public benefits unit in the Bergen County office, and became program-wide Supervisor of that unit in 2007. She also worked in the Passaic County office for several years as Assistant Deputy Director before moving to the Hudson County office as Deputy Director. She has led multiple projects including NNJLS’s latest outreach plan, its Ryan White program, and most recently an organization-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiative.

Current Executive Director, Jack Fitzgerald, shared, “It has been very rewarding to see Ms. Ashe thrive in her expanding roles over the years. It’s rare to find an individual whose vision and leadership are so closely informed by first-hand work with the people we serve. The need for our services is great in these three counties, and I know she will be a tremendous asset as we move forward.”

As the Executive Director, Ms. Ashe will be responsible for programs that serve more than 11,000 people each year in areas including housing, public benefits, family, and consumer law. The organization addresses the ongoing civil legal needs of individuals and families in vulnerable communities, such as domestic violence, bankruptcy, food stamps, and education. It also targets widespread urgent needs throughout its service areas such as the housing and eviction crisis brought on by the pandemic.

“I started my career at NNJLS and know we are one of the most important and innovative programs in our region working to bridge the civil legal justice gap here in New Jersey. I’m honored and so pleased to continue the strong legacy of leadership at NNJLS, and to leverage our deep community ties, incredible staff, and organizational knowledge to continue to increase access to justice,” said Ms. Ashe. “There is so much potential for legal services as a tool for real, sustainable impact and social change. As the need in our communities grows, I know that we will continue to meet the challenge. I’m excited to begin this next chapter in my career and continue to work with the great staff at NNJLS.”

ABOUT NNJLS:

NNJLS is a private, non-profit public interest law firm that provides free civil legal services to income-eligible residents of Bergen, Hudson, and Passaic counties. We also work to increase the public’s knowledge of their rights and responsibilities through community legal education.

NNJLS focuses on four core areas of civil law—housing, consumer, family, and public benefits. These are the areas in which our clients are most likely to develop legal problems that they cannot address themselves. With experienced attorneys on staff, NNJLS works to ensure that clients do not lose their housing due to eviction or foreclosure; that they are

not harassed by debt collectors or victimized by unfair business practices; that they and their families have fair custody and support arrangements in the event of separation or divorce; and that they can receive the public benefits and other forms of income support they need to maintain their independence and meet their daily needs.

NNJLS also has specialized programs in place to address the legal needs of veterans; seniors; survivors of domestic violence; survivors of sexual assault; students; immigrants; persons living with HIV or AIDS; individuals formerly incarcerated who now face legal barriers to employment; individuals experiencing homelessness; and residents experiencing poverty with federal income tax (IRS) issues.

As one of the largest providers of free legal assistance in the state, NNJLS serves a population of great racial, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity. NNJLS's staff of experienced attorneys and support personnel provides free legal assistance to residents experiencing poverty from all parts of its service area – from the urban centers of Hackensack, Jersey City, and Paterson to the more “rural” areas of northern Bergen and Passaic Counties. In 2021, more than 11,000 people received free legal help from NNJLS.

For more information about our work, please visit northeastnjlegalservices.org.