



NORTHEAST NEW JERSEY LEGAL SERVICES

Equal Justice for All

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Jersey City, NJ Northeast New Jersey Legal Services (NNJLS) announced today that John Fitzgerald, the organization's executive director, will retire effective July 1, 2022.

Fitzgerald has been executive director since 2007, when he joined the organization shortly after it was formed from three county offices. Under his direction the newly unified offices became a robust regional program, expanding the reach of their services in housing, family, consumer, and public interest law, areas in which low-income clients were most likely to have a legal problem they could not solve themselves. Today, NNJLS serves Bergen, Passaic and Hudson counties with more than 100 staff attorneys in addition to paralegals and management, and provides legal assistance to 10,000 people a year.

Shared Fitzgerald, "My time at NNJLS has been a tremendous opportunity to spend my professional life in the cause of equal justice, working together with our talented, hard-working staff and volunteers. I could not have asked for more."

Board Chair Jack Wind, who has served with Fitzgerald during Fitzgerald's entire tenure at NNJLS, said, "In my capacity as board chair, it has been a great pleasure to work together with Jack Fitzgerald these past fifteen years to increase access to justice in our communities. Under his leadership, Northeast New Jersey Legal Services has grown tremendously across all three of our counties and he is leaving the organization stronger than ever. It's a privilege to count him as both a colleague and a friend."

Fitzgerald has dedicated his career to legal services, much of it in director roles. Before becoming executive director at NNJLS, Fitzgerald served for three years as deputy director of NNJLS's Passaic County Division, and prior to that he served as the executive director of Warren County Legal Services for 18 years. Drawn to legal services as an instrument of social justice, Fitzgerald spent his first clerkship working with low-income clients for California Rural Legal Assistance and San Francisco Neighborhood Legal Assistance, formative experiences that showed him the potential of legal aid in under-resourced communities.

Fitzgerald holds a law degree from the University of the Pacific in Sacramento, California and has served on the Special Civil Part Practice Committee and the District XIII Ethics Committee for the Supreme Court of New Jersey.

NNJLS's director of litigation, Gregory Diebold, noted that Fitzgerald's forward-thinking leadership has defined the organization over time and also in a crisis. "Jack's support for the program's litigation has given NNJLS an outstanding reputation as a law firm not only in our service area but nationally," he said. "But I most admire Jack for the way he handled our operations when faced with the Covid-19 pandemic. He kept the program running smoothly, made sure clients were serviced in the most difficult of times, and placed the safety of our staff as his number one priority."

A search committee comprised of board members, managers, and staff has begun the process of identifying a successor, in partnership with Patricia Pap, the executive director at Management Information Exchange.

Said Fitzgerald, "I am confident that NNJLS is poised to build on our growth and expand the breadth and reach of its services, and that our organization's next director will provide expert leadership for this new phase."

"It's impossible for me to convey the range of my feelings as I prepare to leave the people and the place from which I've learned so much," he said. "Leaving isn't easy, but I'm heartened by the good work we've done together, and by all that still lies ahead for NNJLS."

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About Northeast New Jersey Legal Services:

Northeast New Jersey Legal Services (NNJLS), with a mission to ensure equal access to justice, is a private non-profit public interest law firm that provides free legal assistance in civil matters to low-income and underserved individuals and families residing in Bergen, Hudson, and Passaic Counties, NJ. NNJLS focuses on four core areas of civil law—housing, consumer, family, and public benefits.

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