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NJ Social Justice Organization Names New GC

Rachel Kaplan, New Jersey Law Journal

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About three months after bringing aboard new president and CEO Ryan Haygood, the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice (NJISJ) has named LaShawn Warren as its new vice president and general counsel.

Warren previously worked as a civil rights attorney for nearly 20 years and has served in leadership positions on several social policy and legislative boards. She previously served as legislative counsel for civil rights in the Washington, D.C., Legislative Office of the American Civil Liberties Union and as oversight counsel to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary.

She comes to the NJISJ after serving as vice president of policy development and programming at the American Constitution Society for Law and Policy, where she supervised the organization's national programming.

Warren graduated magna cum laude from Savannah State College and earned a certificate in nonprofit management from Georgetown University. She went on to earn her J.D. from Howard University School of Law, and this past May, graduated from Yale Divinity School, where she studied "ethics, faith, and social movements and effective paradigms for building healthy urban communities," according to a press release.

"I have devoted my career to addressing the root causes of social and economic disparities and to creating greater opportunity for marginalized communities. At such a critical moment, I am excited to join the NJISJ's dedicated team to continue its important work in creating more inclusive urban communities," Warren said in a statement.

Founded in 1999 by Alan Lowenstein—who also founded Lowenstein Sandler—the NJISJ was created with the goal of identifying barriers that challenge urban residents and empowering those residents to overcome those obstacles.

"Sixteen years later, our mission is as important as it was when Mr. Lowenstein first founded the institute," Haygood said.

Currently, the NJISJ operates out of a Newark office of 12 employees with backgrounds ranging from litigation and legal policy advocacy to workforce growth and social work. The organization

operates through small career-focused seminars, legal advocacy and support and community outreach programs to assist impoverished New Jersey urban residents coming out of incarceration.

Haygood described the NJISJ as an "urban do-and-think tank, which provides high-level research on critical issues, and takes that research and lessons learned to effectuate real meaningful change in urban communities and to provide meaningful pathways to employment."

Haygood was a lawyer for the NAACP in New York City for 13 years before coming to Newark to work with the NJISJ in April.

He was recently given the Raymond A. Brown Award by the Garden State Bar Association for his work with the NJISJ.

On NJISJ's plans for the future, Haygood said he and Warren "hope to develop a community-responsible urban agenda that seeks to identify and work with community partners to combat load-bearing laws of structural inequality."

Haygood said Warren's addition to the NJISJ will help to expand the organization's outreach programs, strengthen its re-establishment initiatives and further develop its growth plans.

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