

Dear Mandated Representation leaders, State, County and City officials, and Indigent Legal Services Board members,

All of us at the Office of Indigent Legal Services wish you and your loved ones the happiest of winter holidays. 2019 has been a year of great progress and promise, as the five *Hurrell-Harring* (HH) counties met or exceeded the terms of the Settlement Agreement which resolved that historic litigation; and virtually every county has entered into a five-year contract with ILS that will fully implement the HH reforms in every office, in every county and New York City by 2023. Furthermore, the February release of the Interim Report of Chief Judge DiFiore's **Commission on Parental Legal Representation**, chaired by former Presiding Justice Karen Peters, demonstrated what we all know to be true: that the reform of legally mandated Parental Representation is every bit as much a constitutional imperative as is the ongoing reform of legally mandated criminal public defense.

It has now been almost nine years that we have been working cooperatively to, in the words of our governing statute, "make efforts to improve the quality of services provided pursuant to article eighteen-B of the county law." In this effort, we have enjoyed the consistent and cooperative support of Governor Cuomo and his staff; the Assembly and the Senate; the Office of Court Administration (OCA); New York City through its Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ); every county and the New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC); and the New York State Bar Association (NYSBA). Everything we have accomplished has been guided by our invaluable ILS Board, chaired and very capably led, first by Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman and, since 2016, by Chief Judge Janet DiFiore.

This is no time to rest on our laurels or to be satisfied with our accomplishments. As 2019 merges into 2020, we must begin the long-neglected reform of parental legal representation, specifically including the appropriation of five million dollars in Aid to Localities to aid counties in their efforts to provide representation that complies with Constitutional requirements, and the addition of a dedicated Parental Representation research position to our staff. We must also work together to address the issue of long stagnant and utterly inadequate hourly rates for the assigned private counsel who fulfill the state's responsibility to provide effective representation for those who are entitled to counsel, yet cannot afford to hire a lawyer.

None of these vital and long-sought goals can be achieved by any of us working alone. If we are to succeed, we must all work together. We look forward to doing just that, by working in cooperation with you once again in 2020 – after we all enjoy a peaceful and happy holiday season.

From the ILS staff:

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