

ABA/NLADA EQUAL JUSTICE CONFERENCE (EJC)- MAY 15-17, 2025

Submitted by: Christine M. Flynn

The 27th Annual American Bar Association (ABA)/National Legal Aid & Defender Association (NLADA) Equal Justice Conference (EJC) was held on May 15-17, 2025 at the Hilton San Francisco Union Square. I attended the conference on behalf of NFPA in my capacity as the NFPA Pro Bono and Community Service Coordinator and NFPA Liaison to The ABA Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service. The ABA/NLADA Equal Justice Conference is an annual gathering of legal services and pro bono advocates to share and learn about developments and innovations in providing legal services to low-income people. The emphasis of this Conference is on strengthening partnerships among the key players in the civil justice system. Through plenary sessions, workshops, networking opportunities and special programming, the Conference provides a wide range of learning and sharing experiences for all attendees.

THURSDAY- MAY 15, 2025

On Thursday, May 15, 2025, I headed to the conference floor for registration.



The Opening Plenary Session was held Thursday morning following the completion of registration. The 2025 EJC commenced with welcome remarks from the Conference Co-Chairs, The Honorable Bryant Yang- Member of the ABA Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service, Salena Copeland- Executive Director, Legal Aid Association of California, and Jack Londen, Esquire- a partner at Morrison Foerster. The opening plenary session included a passionate speech by Tracy Rosenthal, Keynote Speaker, co-founder of the L.A. Tenants Union and co-author of *Abolish Rent: How Tenants Can End the Housing Crisis*. Tracy Rosenthal offered a bold call to organize in the fight for housing and justice. The Host Committee announced that attendance at the 2025 EJC exceeded 1,000!



Speakers at Opening Plenary Session

The EJC had 20 exhibitors. I visited the Exhibitor Showcase and spoke with several vendors/exhibitors/sponsors to promote NFPA and network with respect to future paralegal pro bono opportunities. These included the ABA Center for Pro Bono, NLADA, Animal Legal Defense Fund and Frontline Justice (just to name a few)!



Representatives from Animal Legal Defense Fund



Representatives from Frontline Justice

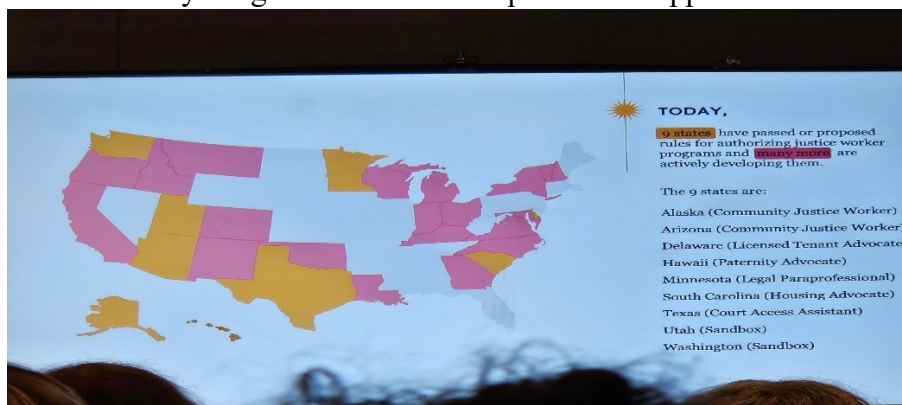


Tali Albuquerk, Chief Counsel ABA

A reminder to NFPA members that many of the vendors/sponsors/exhibitors at the EJC offer paralegal memberships to their respective organizations. Please contact Christine Flynn (cflynn917@yahoo.com) for additional information on specific organizations of interest.

SESSIONS- THURSDAY- MAY 15, 2025

The first session I elected to attend on Thursday was entitled “Developing Training and Credentialing Standards for the Future of Justice: Ascendium and Frontline Justice’s Community Justice Worker National Taskforce.” This session was presented by Rebecca Sandefur- Director of the Sanford School of Social and Family Dynamics at Arizona State University, Brian Rubin- Senior Education Designer at the Education Design Lab, Nikole Nelson- CEO at Frontline Justice and Rebecca Rapp- General Counsel & Chief Privacy Officer of Ascendium Education Group, Inc. a non-profit. It was amazing to see the work of Community Justice Workers (CJWs) in real time. The presenters outlined the role of CJWs, reviewed the status of CJWs programs (by state) and discussed the work of the Community Justice Worker Taskforce, launched by Frontline Justice in January, 2025. <https://www.frontlinejustice.org/task-force>. The speakers discussed how best to design and implement low-barrier competency-based curriculum and credentialing pathways for CJWs with support from Ascendium Education Solutions. This included a discussion on validation for life experience with ways to gain the trust of the public for support of CJWs.



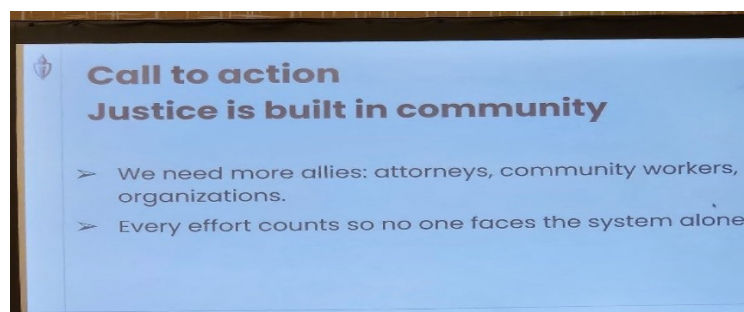
Updated map of the United States with status of justice worker programs

The speakers also announced the formation of the Groundwork on-line platform (which is discussed more fully below) to expand community justice work. The presenters also acknowledged obstacles and criticism of CJWs, including concerns of proper supervision of CJWs and negative feelings towards the appearance of a “two-tiered” legal system in the United States.

During this session, I also met Brienn Paniagua, a Bi-lingual Resource Navigator/Community Justice Worker, who was attending the EJC. Brienn works with Palacios Community Hub, a non-profit in southwest Texas in the area of immigration advocacy. We discussed her background and experience as a CJW. We had so much to talk about that we actually met again for breakfast the following morning! Brienn is a compassionate, dedicated individual and wonderful resource. Another great connection made at the EJC!

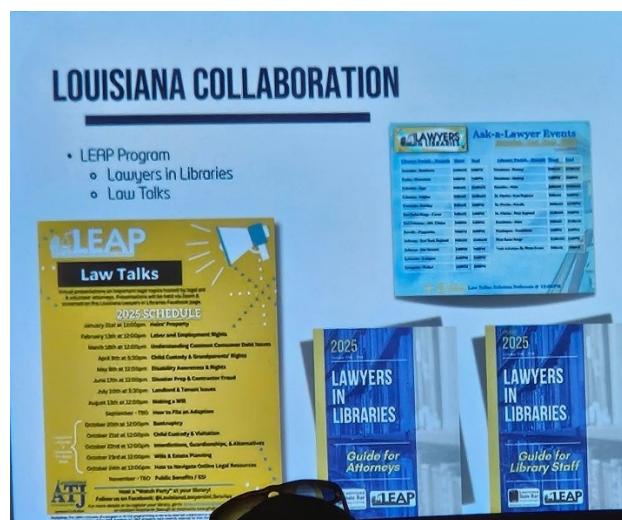
My next session on Thursday was the “Networking Lunch.” The EJC networking lunch included 11 different sessions of “hot topics” facing our communities and constituencies. I attended the Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) Power Hour session to re-connect for possible paralegal pro bono opportunities for our members. The Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) is a collaborative approach that integrates civil legal aid with healthcare services to address social determinants of health and improve patient outcomes. Examples include a client who may have unpaid medical bills only to find out that they may qualify for health insurance or applying for benefits to reduce water bills, etc. This was an interactive discussion between attendees from throughout the United States. Speakers included Gerson Sorto from Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles, Sarah Hooper from UC Law SF, MLP for Seniors, Vanessa Davis- National Program Lead for Housing for Health at Kaiser Permanente and Alejandra Cabrera from HealthBegins. Much to my delight, I sat next to three EJC attendees from Community Legal Services in Philadelphia! Additional information on the MLP can be found at: <https://medical-legalpartnership.org/>

The afternoon EJC session continued with a timely topic “Overcoming the Access to Justice Gap for Asylum Seekers and New Arrivals.” This session was presented by Estuardo Cifuentes- Program Manager at Project Corazon, the immigration branch of Lawyers for Good Government, Ted Jacobs, Esquire- partner at Baker Hostetler, Jennifer Wolf-Williams from Migrant Emotional Health and Jessica Riley, Esquire from the Lawyers for Good Government (L4GG) Project. The presenters reviewed and discussed how to use a blend of technology, pro bono management and client empowerment to bridge gaps in the immigration process and improve access to justice for asylum seekers and low income immigrants lacking full representation services.



Jennifer Wolfe-Williams also discussed the Humanitarian Outreach for Migrant Emotional Health (HOME) project. The purpose of this organization is to ensure the voices of traumatized migrants are heard and understood. This is completed by listening to and documenting accounts of human rights abuses, by serving as expert witnesses for asylum petitions, and by advocating for policies that will preserve emotional health. Additional information on the program, stories, donation and volunteer opportunities can be found at: <https://www.homemigration.org/about>. The panel also stressed that the need is great for courtroom navigators, community workers and creative partnerships to be formed to assist with the immigration crisis at the southern border and the overwhelming difficulties with unaccompanied minors.

Next up on Thursday afternoon, I attended the session “Maximizing Impact: Collaborative Models for Utilizing Libraries to Increase Pro Bono Engagement & Address Legal Inequities. This was a very enlightening session opening a new door of collaboration. The session was presented by Pauline Afuso, a Public Service Librarian from Alameda County Law Library, Stephanie Beaugh- ATJ Projects Counsel at the Louisiana State Bar Association and Karen Westwood- Director at the Hennepin County Law Library. This session discussed the vital role that libraries play in addressing legal inequities through partnerships with legal aid organizations. The presenters discussed several successful projects and ways to engage volunteers to serve diverse client needs. One example is Lawyers in Libraries, a project in Louisiana. <https://www.lsba.org/LouisianaLawyersinLibraries/forlibrarians.aspx>

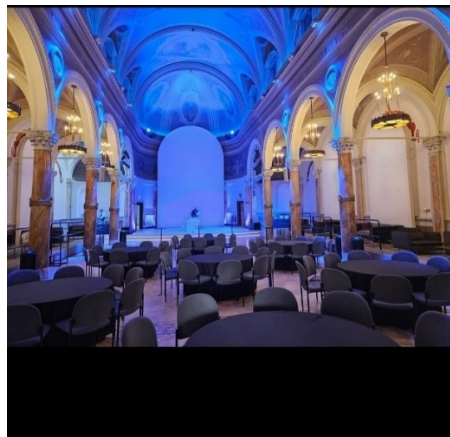


In this program, volunteer attorneys meet with patrons one-on-one to answer their civil legal questions and connect them to further resources. Additional collaborations include virtual clinics and the “Law Talks” educational series covering topics such as child custody, bankruptcy and public benefits (presented by in person and virtually). There are similar programs (Lawyers for Good Government (L4GG)) throughout the country, including Connecticut, Maryland and Pennsylvania. In fact, Philadelphia Legal Assistance (PLA) previously partnered with the Free Library of Philadelphia to bring legal information and resources to the community. As noted in the future suggestions section of this report, NFPA may wish to explore outreach to the American

Library Association (ALA) <https://www.ala.org/> and the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) <https://www.aallnet.org/> for future collaboration and partnership(s). In fact, there was additional discussion about the role librarians may serve as CJWs (similar to paralegals) with training in aiding in the access to justice crisis.

The last session I attended on Thursday was entitled “Legal Help for Kinship Caregivers: Innovative Service Delivery Models to Meet Emergent Client Needs. This session was presented by Elizabeth Wehner, Molly Russell and Angela White of Legal Aid of West Virginia. The presenters discussed the opioid crisis and innovative, multi-faceted strategies to meet emergent legal needs of kinship families caring for impacted children. The panel explored how programs can respond to emergent, technology and pro bono involvement through outreach, community partnerships, technology and pro bono involvement. This program includes assistance with guardianship, estate planning and public benefits. The program also provides a staffed hot line. Paralegal volunteers assist with administrative and clerical support as well.

The day closed with “Story Slam” where fellow attendees shared inspiring stories about strength, resilience and justice in their communities. This event was followed by the Host Committee Reception held at the Melody of San Francisco, a unique venue with historic charm. It was an evening of networking, dancing and celebrating legal services and pro bono advocates.



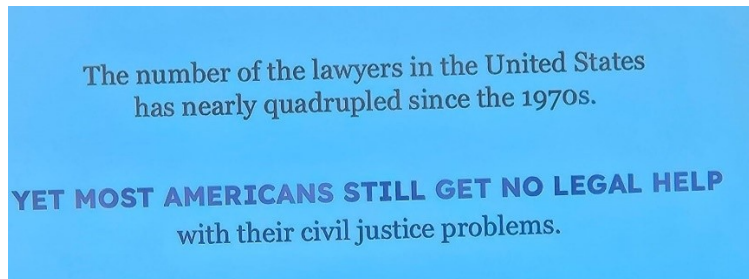
The Melody venue

SESSIONS- FRIDAY- MAY 16, 2025

Friday was an extremely busy day filled with networking, additional educational sessions, and the Awards luncheon. The first session of the day was entitled “Technology and Non-Lawyer Solutions to the Access to Justice Crisis.” This session was presented by Sasha Steinberger- Founder and Co-Executive Director of Legal Link and Erica Nelson- Executive Director at LIFT Wisconsin. The speakers discussed LIFT Wisconsin <https://liftwisconsin.org/> and Legal Link <https://legallink.org/> and how their organizations increase access to legal information for low-income individuals by using accessible web-based tools coupled with training. These simple tools support the development of a cadre of CJWs who can bridge the justice gap and empower

community members to address civil legal challenges that too often create barriers to economic stability and well-being. This is done through in-person clinics, by training justice navigators, and developing the LegalTuneUp tool.

The second session of the day that I elected to attend was entitled “Upstreaming Justice Non-Attorney Innovation and Community Based Solutions to Civil Legal Gaps.” This session was presented by Nikole Nelson- CEO of Frontline Justice, Ignacio Jaureguilorda- Director, Civil Access to Justice Initiatives, Center for Justice Innovation and Dr. Rishi Manchanda- President and CEO of HealthBegins. This session explored innovative upstream models from Frontline Justice, the Center for Justice Innovation, and HealthBegins, focusing on non-attorney interventions to bridge civil justice gaps. Attendees gained practical insights into applying these approaches to address unmet legal needs through preventive, community-based strategies and problem-solving projects in various courts.



Upstreaming Justice Presentation

On Friday, I also attended the Awards Luncheon honoring the National Association of Pro Bono Professional Award recipients and the NLADA Nan Heald Innovations in Equal Justice Award. William “Bill” Bay, President & CEO of the American Bar Association, along with April Frazier Camara, President & CEO of the NLADA, presented opening remarks. The NAPPRO Award winner was Claud B. Nelson III (Florida). The NLADA Innovation in Equal Justice Award was presented to Jennifer Bentley, Executive Director at the Michigan State Bar Foundation.



Colleagues from the National Association of IOLTA Programs with award winner, Jennifer Bentley

ABA President Bill Bay also gave an inspiring speech on the current landscape of U.S. civil legal services. He called on attendees to unite and aid in the current access to justice crisis. ABA President Bill Bay stated “There is never a wrong time to stand up for what is right.” I was truly honored to stand alongside so many in the legal services community working to advance justice and uphold the rule of law.

“There’s never a wrong time to stand up for what is right. And that’s what we need to do.” —ABA President Bill Bay #ejc25



ABA President William “Bill” Bay

The third session of the day was entitled “Building Bridges: Enhancing Pro Bono Impact Through Strategic Partnerships. The session was presented by Lisa Dane-Charles River Associates, Lesley Johannesen-Sanctuary for Families, Dara Sheinfeld, Esquire- Davis Polk and Wardwell LLP and Beth Hofmeister- The Legal Aid Society. The session had over 70 attendees! This session explored how strategic partnerships among legal services organizations, law firms, companies, and expert consultants enhance legal services. The panelists discussed real-world examples, overcoming barriers, and practical tools to forge impactful alliances, ultimately improving access to justice for underserved communities. The panel included an interactive discussion on how experts can serve in pro bono cases.



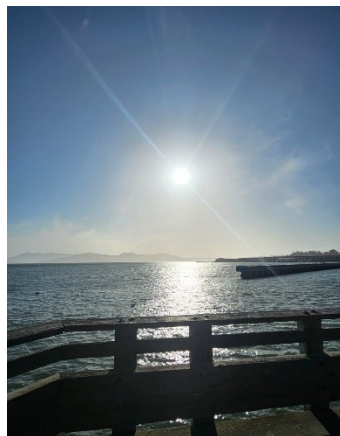
Panelists

The fourth session of the day I selected was entitled “AI Co-Pilots for Eviction Defense, Re-entry Services and Beyond.” This session was presented by Margaret Hagan- Executive Director of Legal Design Lab and Nora al Haider, Stanford Legal Design, Lab Assistant. The session discussed collaborative ways to build AI tools that are useable, impactful, and safe. Attendees were treated to a new sample of the AI Co-Pilots that legal aid and court help groups are building to assist lawyers and paralegals with delivering high-quality and efficient services to more people. This AI tool will assist with screening and intakes, issue spotting and triage and legal research. Additional information on this project available at: <https://justiceinnovation.law.stanford.edu/justice-ai-co-pilots/>

I closed the day with a visit to a few of the San Francisco landmarks and Bay Area attractions and a wonderful dinner with a view from Pier 39!



Golden Gate Bridge



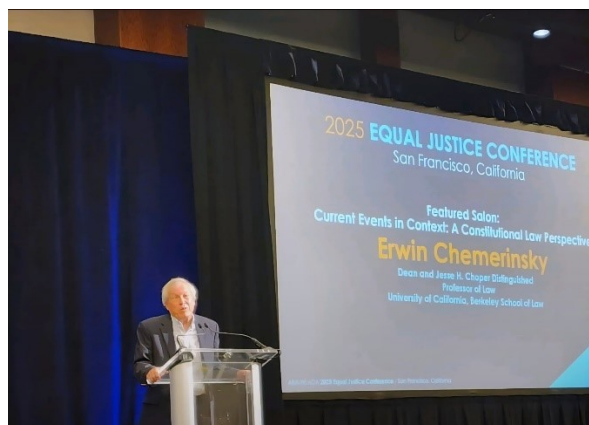
View from Pier 39



Alcatraz Island

SATURDAY- MAY 17, 2025

On Saturday, May 17, 2025, the Closing Plenary Session and Brunch were held. The closing session featured a salon presented by Dean Erwin Chemerinsky, University of California, Berkeley School of Law. Dean Chemerinsky presented “Current Events in Context: A Constitutional Law Perspective Informal Networking.” Dean Chemerinsky outlined an analysis of federal actions through the lens of constitutional law.



Dean Chemerinsky addresses attendees at the Closing Plenary

The Closing Plenary Session continued with “Bridging the Justice Gap: Economic Empowerment and Access to Civil Legal Aid.” This panel discussion was presented by Jocelyn Frye- the National Partnership for Women & Families, Annie Lee- Chinese for Affirmative Action and Kristen Anderson-SPCL Economic Justice, Deputy Legal Director. The panel delved into the intricate relationship between economic empowerment and access to justice, and how the racial wealth gap limits legal assistance for millions in America, which ranks last among 46 high-income countries in terms of accessibility and affordability of civil justice.



The Closing Plenary Session panel discussion

The EJC ended with a post-conference hands-on workshop with CJWs hosted by Frontline Justice. Attendees met and co-designed community justice work solutions and discussed new initiatives and strategies. This workshop was well-attended (with no additional space in the room). The panel also discussed the new collaborative networking platform, Groundwork. Groundwork is a platform for growing the community justice community. Groundwork serves as a vital resource for community justice workers and allies committed to addressing the civil justice crisis throughout the United States.



Attendees collaborate at the Community Justice Workers workshop

Individuals can join Groundwork for active discussion groups, an evidence-based resource library, and a directory of justice workers and allies across the country. <https://www.frontlinejustice.org/news/official-launch-of-groundwork-empowering-community-justice-workers>

CONFERENCE- CONCLUSION

I extend my sincere thanks to the NFPA Board for supporting and approving my attendance at the ABA/NLADA Equal Justice Conference as well as the ongoing support of our outreach on paralegal pro bono projects. The conference was attended by over 1,000 individuals from every aspect of pro bono. Our attendance confirmed NFPA's ongoing commitment as the leader of the paralegal profession. The Conference also afforded me the opportunity to network and expand our ability to help those in need, foster our skills and experience, increase dialogue, while garnering innovative ideas about how to approach pro bono and community service projects. Our main objective remains increasing awareness and educating the legal profession about the many roles paralegals can fill to help reduce the access to justice gap. However, I can truly attest that again the most important take-away from this Conference was our rekindled inspiration, passion, and energy for the importance of NFPA's ongoing work and dedication to assist in the access to justice efforts. As the leader of the paralegal profession, I look forward to continuing our crucial work in this area through NFPA.

******Additional recommendations for NFPA Board consideration******

- (1) Attend the 2026 Equal Justice Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina May 13-16, 2026;
- (2) Submit a proposal for NFPA to present at the 2026 EJC. The session should address the growing trend of paralegals, paralegal practioners, community justice workers, courtroom navigators, legal navigators, limited license, as well as other "non-lawyers" in meeting the access to justice gap. My vision for this session is a panel to address status of state

licensure/regulation by state and provide examples of background, required training, licensing/certification process, client experiences and case study discussions in the access to justice;

- (3) I do not believe that NFPA currently has a member association in North Carolina. Attendance at the 2026 EJC conference will allow us to explore opportunities to develop relationships and contacts in that state;
- (4) In lieu of an attendee registration at the 2026 EJC, NFPA should give consideration to again signing on as a sponsor, vendor, or exhibitor of the ABA/NLADA Conference. This conference is attended by over 1,000 individuals from all walks of the pro bono and legal field and across the country. It is an *excellent* opportunity to market NFPA and recruit new members;
- (5) If the decision is made to exhibit at the 2026 EJC, we should order updated NFPA marketing merchandise. Highlighters and stress balls are outdated items. The playing cards that we used as a give away at the 2024 conference in Detroit were in high demand by attendees. Consideration should be given to more technology-based give way items such as "PopSockets" for cell phones or perhaps other items such as hand sanitizers, tote bags, Chapstick, candy tins, etc. Also, we should collect business cards from attendees and raffle a \$50.00 gift card to attract attendees to the NFPA exhibitor table;
- (6) The NFPA Access to Justice Committee should reach out to Brienn Paniagua, a Bi-lingual Resource Navigator/Community Justice Worker, whom I met at the EJC as an additional contact and potential speaker to present an NFPA webinar on CJWs;
- (7) Consider reaching out to the ALA or AALL to establish contact and connections for collaboration on future projects as noted in my session above;
- (8) Continue outreach and monitoring of the Frontline Justice web pages including Groundwork for up-to-date information on CJWs;
- (9) Promote paralegal membership in both the American Bar Association (ABA)
https://www.americanbar.org/membership/?utm_medium=sem&utm_source=google&utm_campaign=mk25adsa&promo=mk25gacbr&gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=8159578757&gbraid=0AAAAACIWeMRWUh_talKpEdZUTfa87ERTP&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIqbeFgLrCjQMV2VxHAR1_6

zUdEAAYASAAEgIoQ_D_BwE and National Legal Aid and Defenders Association (NLADA) <https://www.nlada.org/become-member/individual-membership>;

- (10) I will spotlight additional paralegal pro bono opportunities from connections made at the EJC via *News You Can Use*, including the Medical-Legal Partnership. NFPA needs to bolster its social media postings and presence. I will work with the NFPA social media coordinator to highlight paralegal pro bono opportunities;
- (11) The NFPA pro bono page on the web site must be reviewed and updated to include the this 2025 EJC report, the Celebration of Pro Bono and current paralegal pro bono opportunities and community service projects. I will also work with the web site coordinator and/or HQ to revamp this page. Additional discussion will be held with Beth Bialis and the NFPA Board on merging the NFPA Access to Justice Committee and Pro Bono Committee (housed in one tab on the web site); and
- (11) I will forward an e-mail communication to the NFPA Region Directors requesting a listing of any pro bono committees and/or chairs in each local NFPA association. Once this information is received, I will complete outreach to the individual pro bono committees/chairs with additional information from EJC connections on local pro bono opportunities and community service events.

Copies of the EJC Program and Agenda and additional questions on sessions and/or materials should be directed to Christine Flynn- cflynn917@yahoo.com Thank you.