

Almeida named Rhode Island Legal Services chair

By **James Bessette**
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VICTORIA M. ALMEIDA, a shareholder at Providence-based law firm Adler Pollock & Sheehan PC, was recently appointed chairperson of the Rhode Island Legal Services board of directors. Almeida is a past president of the Rhode Island Bar Association and is vice chairperson of the Rhode Island Parole Board. Almeida is also a recipient of the Neil J. Houston Award, presented by Justice Assistance, for her service and contribution to the criminal justice profession.

What was it about practicing law that made you want to pursue it as a career? There is a photo that I treasure. It was taken in November 1969 by The Providence Journal. The young college freshman in the photo is in a picket line outside a supermarket in Newport. She is holding a sign that reads "Thanksgiving Without Grapes." That was my first experience with injustice, as it was directed at migrant farm workers. I decided then that I

wanted to do more than demonstrate. I wanted to become the voice of those who had no voice. That is why I pursued a career in law and why I am honored to chair the board of Rhode Island Legal Services.

You were the first woman in state history to be appointed executive counsel to a governor. Explain what that experience was like, both working for a governor and being a pioneer in this role. After law school, I was offered the career opportunity of a lifetime, which has had a lasting impact on me, my profession and my community. I became the first woman to serve as executive counsel to a governor. The governor was J. Joseph Garrahy, who demonstrated, by word and deed, those qualities essential for my legal career, as well as for my 43 years of public service. I was privileged and honored to be the first woman lawyer to advise a governor and serve my fellow citizens. I am delighted that many women lawyers have served in that role in the ensuing years with great distinction.

What are you most proud of in working as an attorney? I am most proud of how my experiences in all three branches of government – executive, legislative and judicial – allow me to assist my business clients. I am equally proud of my work for clients I serve on a pro bono basis.

What are your plans as board chair of Rhode Island Legal Services? I would like to focus on the Rhode Island Legal Services Holistic Legal Assistance Network, which offers an interdisciplinary approach to resolving legal problems for Rhode Islanders. HLAN creates the opportunity for RILS to empower the client community and help end poverty one family at a time by collaborating with credit counseling and social service providers to overcome legal, financial and social barriers.