

**OCEAN COUNTY CHAPTER, NJ NAMI
RAMP, RENAUD & HLAVENKA**

PRESS RELEASE

**ATTORNEY TO SPEAK ON CHANGES NEEDED
IN JUSTICE SYSTEM TO ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES**

*Mental health advocate will outline reforms at membership meeting
of mental health support organization*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (TOMS RIVER, NJ, October 5, 2010) – East Brunswick attorney and mental health advocate Ann Renaud will speak at the monthly membership meeting of the Ocean County Chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) at 6:30 p.m., Wednesday, Oct. 13, in the cafeteria of the Ocean County Administration Office, 129 Hooper Ave., Toms River. The meeting is open to the public and admission is free.

“As an attorney and a former municipal court judge, I’ve seen firsthand the suffering that occurs when people with mental illness or substance abuse, or both, get caught up in a legal system that is not set up to deal with their problems,” Ms. Renaud said. “Too often, people with mental illnesses or developmental disabilities are viewed solely in terms of their special needs by a system that has neither the expertise nor the resources to effectively deal with them. The result is unnecessary suffering to the individuals and harm to our society as a whole.”

Ms. Renaud has called on Gov. Chris Christie to create mental health courts and to dedicate greater resources for research into mental illnesses and to bring insurance reimbursement for mental health services on par with other health services.

“I believe we can remake our judicial system in a way that takes a more compassionate approach toward dealing effectively with people who have mental health issues or are in need of drug rehabilitation,” Ms. Renaud said. “Instead of viewing people as problems that need to be managed, we should all become their advocates and take on the challenge of unleashing the possibilities that exist within them.”

She said lawmakers and court officials have given us, at best, a system that is simply inadequate. It hurts the people who need special help as well the communities that will eventually have to deal with them after they’ve failed to receive that help, she said.

“Despite decades of good intentions on the part of our policymakers and the court system, the justice system in New Jersey today is inadequate. And the price of that failure is being paid not just by those who need help and aren’t getting it, but by all of us,” she said in her blog on www.ramprenaud.com. “Failing to deal effectively with mental health issues only results in further suffering by the individual and harm to society.”

Ms. Renaud said fundamental changes are needed in the way our system metes justice for those with mental health issues, citing the words of Baltimore Judge Charlotte Cooksey: “Our jails have become de facto psychiatric hospitals. That must change.”

Ms. Renaud will talk about the rights of those with mental health and substance abuse issues at the quarterly membership meeting of the Ocean County Chapter of NAMI. She will explore ways individuals caught in the justice system can advocate for themselves and utilize available public and private resources.

Ms. Renaud, who blogs regularly about the challenges faced by those with mental illness, developmental and intellectual disabilities and substance abuse issues, will field questions from the audience.

About NAMI

NAMI New Jersey is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of individuals and families who are affected by mental illness. The Ocean County Chapter of NAMI is located in Toms River.

About Ramp, Renaud & Hlavenka

The East Brunswick, NJ, law firm of Ramp, Renaud & Hlavenka, LLC provides its clients with in-depth expertise across all its practice areas—the sort of knowledge that enables its lawyers to chart successful strategies and deliver winning outcomes. Making that proficiency even more powerful is the meticulous preparation that goes into every case. The firm's attorneys treat every client with kindness and compassion. They understand that when individuals reach out to a lawyer, they are seeking help with their most personal and pressing problems.

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