

News

Former Legal Aid Head Seymour James Joins Growing Barkett Epstein

The boutique criminal defense and civil rights firm also announced the addition of John LoTurco in Suffolk County, adding substantial depth to the firm in both New York City and on Long Island.

By Colby Hamilton September 4, 2018



The **recently departed** head of the Legal Aid Society, Seymour James, has signed on as a partner with boutique criminal defense and civil rights firm Barket Epstein & Kearon, as part of an expansion that includes the addition of a top Suffolk County practitioner and a name change for the firm.

Now called Barket, Epstein, Kearon, Aldea & LoTurco, the firm also merged with criminal defense attorney John LoTurco's firm, making him a partner. LoTurco, a former prosecutor in the county who recently was named the Suffolk County Bar Association's practitioner of the year, is regarded as a top criminal defense attorney on the island.



John LoTurco. Courtesy photo

His addition provides the firm, as its founder Bruce Barket told the New York Law Journal, with a talented insider in the county's close-knit legal community.

“He is a great trial attorney,” Barket said. “He’s had tremendous success out there over the last 20 years.”

“I am truly honored to join the passionate and dynamic lawyers at Barket Epstein who have a long record of defending clients against injustice and inequality here on Long Island and across New York state,” LoTurco said in a statement. “I look forward to working with this top-notch team to continue to provide all of our clients the highest quality advocacy.”

Similarly, the hiring of James provides the firm with a top name in New York’s defense bar to help anchor the firm’s Manhattan office. The former attorney-in-chief of the largest public defender organization in the state, James also served as the New York State Bar Association president from 2012 to 2013.

For Barket, James represents “potentially the biggest catch yet” for the growing firm.

James himself said he was particularly attracted to Barket Epstein’s work around wrongful convictions and civil rights issues such as police misconduct.

“In some ways it’s kind of a continuation of the work that I was doing, addressing injustices in the criminal justice system, just with a different procedure,” he said. “Lawyers there are really passionate about the work, which reminds me in a lot of ways of the lawyers I worked with at the Legal Aid Society.”

The connections between Barket Epstein and Legal Aid go beyond similar legal passions. As James noted, founding partner Steve Epstein and partner Aida Leisenring are both former Legal Aid public defenders.

The move into private practice will also represent a shift in James’ day-to-day focus. For more than 13 years he operated largely as an administrator at

Legal Aid, first as attorney-in-charge of the criminal practice for nine years before his four years atop the organization as attorney-in-chief. He said he's looking forward to the change.

"I've been doing administration for a long time," he said. "It'll be great to actually represent clients again, to meet with clients again, and address their needs, individually and with my colleagues in the firm."

Barket, too, said he was looking forward to James' impact on the firm.

"I was thrilled of all the firms he could have gone to and options he had, the fact we were on the list made me extremely proud," he said.

According to Barket, he was unaware of James' interest until he heard about it from Esptein.

"I said, 'Get out of here—he can go anywhere he wants,'" Barket recalled. After the two met, Barket said he saw a great opportunity for both James and the firm.

"I think it was a big compliment to us," he said. "I think he's a great fit for us."

James noted the work the firm did securing the release of **Marty Tankleff**, who spent 17 years in prison for murder before having his conviction vacated in 2007, was an example of what made the firm an attractive next-step in his career.

"I think they are really a premier group of lawyers, and they have a breadth of experience at the firm that can handle clients' matters quiet effectively," he said.