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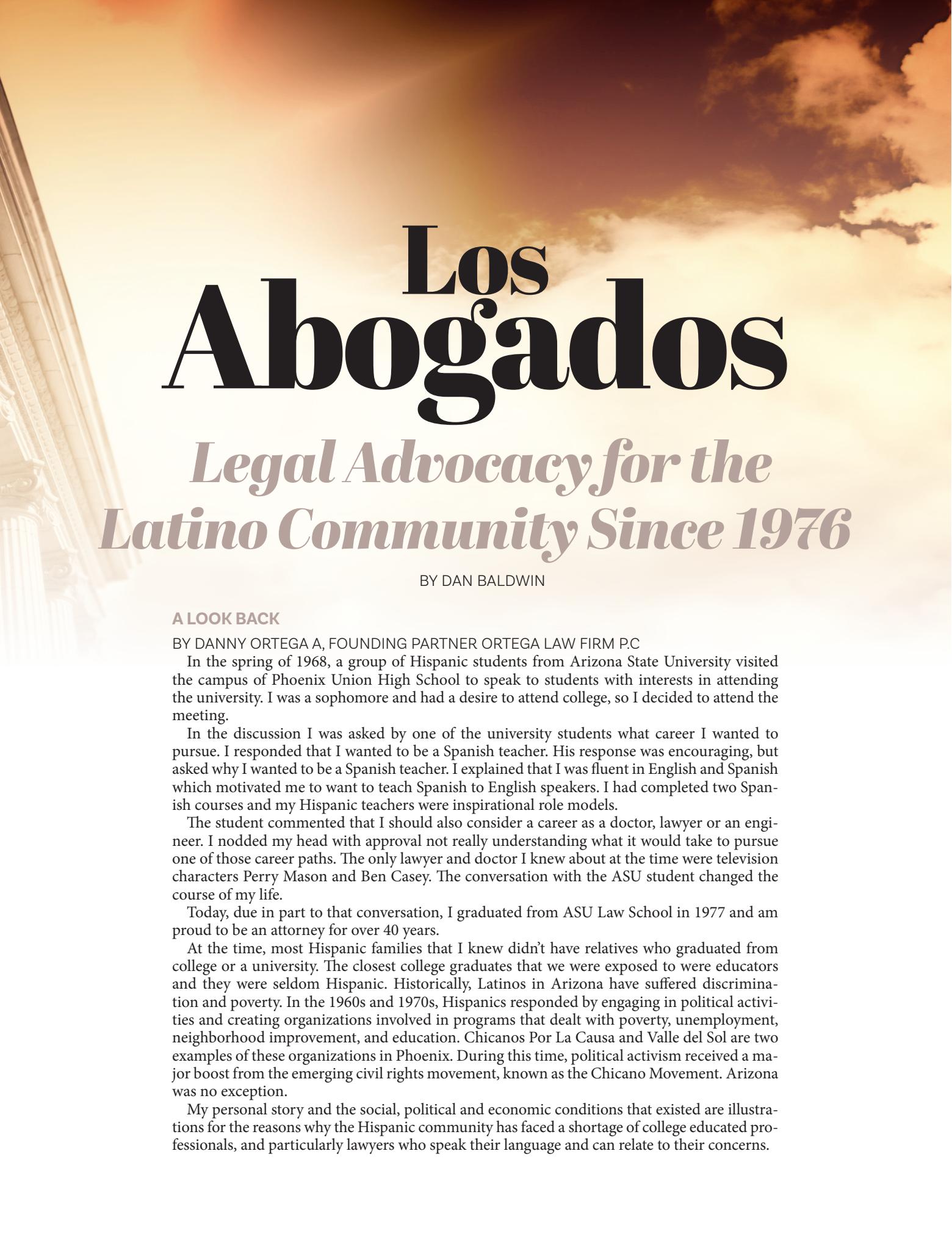
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MAGAZINE®

Los Abogados

DIVERSITY - EDUCATION - ADVOCACY





Los Abogados

Legal Advocacy for the Latino Community Since 1976

BY DAN BALDWIN

A LOOK BACK

BY DANNY ORTEGA A, FOUNDING PARTNER ORTEGA LAW FIRM P.C

In the spring of 1968, a group of Hispanic students from Arizona State University visited the campus of Phoenix Union High School to speak to students with interests in attending the university. I was a sophomore and had a desire to attend college, so I decided to attend the meeting.

In the discussion I was asked by one of the university students what career I wanted to pursue. I responded that I wanted to be a Spanish teacher. His response was encouraging, but asked why I wanted to be a Spanish teacher. I explained that I was fluent in English and Spanish which motivated me to want to teach Spanish to English speakers. I had completed two Spanish courses and my Hispanic teachers were inspirational role models.

The student commented that I should also consider a career as a doctor, lawyer or an engineer. I nodded my head with approval not really understanding what it would take to pursue one of those career paths. The only lawyer and doctor I knew about at the time were television characters Perry Mason and Ben Casey. The conversation with the ASU student changed the course of my life.

Today, due in part to that conversation, I graduated from ASU Law School in 1977 and am proud to be an attorney for over 40 years.

At the time, most Hispanic families that I knew didn't have relatives who graduated from college or a university. The closest college graduates that we were exposed to were educators and they were seldom Hispanic. Historically, Latinos in Arizona have suffered discrimination and poverty. In the 1960s and 1970s, Hispanics responded by engaging in political activities and creating organizations involved in programs that dealt with poverty, unemployment, neighborhood improvement, and education. Chicanos Por La Causa and Valle del Sol are two examples of these organizations in Phoenix. During this time, political activism received a major boost from the emerging civil rights movement, known as the Chicano Movement. Arizona was no exception.

My personal story and the social, political and economic conditions that existed are illustrations for the reasons why the Hispanic community has faced a shortage of college educated professionals, and particularly lawyers who speak their language and can relate to their concerns.

These conditions were the genesis of Los Abogados Hispanic Bar Association. In its most simple form, the founding members of Los Abogados focused on building professional and personal relationships, and increasing the number of Hispanic attorneys who could represent the community's interests individually and collectively. When Los Abogados was founded, there were approximately 50 Hispanic lawyers in Maricopa County and few if any were active in any bar association. The 25 founding members were about mostly in private practice.

I have been a member since 1980, and served on the board from 1985 to 2010 and again from 2013 to 2015. I served as president in 2001. In speaking to Hispanic lawyers over those years, what they appreciated most about Los Abogados was the personal interaction and building of relationships with Hispanic lawyers. It was a place that felt comfortable, like home, with shared values and the opportunity to be involved in volunteer projects that made a significant difference in people's lives.

Los Abogados membership grew to over 200 members. The organization pursued and achieved an increase in employment opportunities for lawyers, an increase in judges at all levels, an increase in the number of law student admissions, as well as an increase in financial assistance. The active members were excellent lawyers and had a profound commitment to create change. Their courage and sacrifice made Los Abogados a highly respected and preeminent bar association. The impact has been significant in the judiciary, legislature, law schools, State Bar, County Bars and the community. We are all fortunate to have been associated with those who made a strong commitment to protect and serve the community. *Adelante Con La Lucha!*

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- DANNY ORTEGA



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FORMER LOS ABOGADOS BOARD MEMBERS

LOS ABOGADOS: DIVERSITY, EDUCATION, ADVOCACY

“By any standard, Los Abogados, Arizona’s Hispanic Bar Association, is a successful and unique bar association built not only on professional relationships among members, but also a commitment to serving the community and to the advancement of Latinos in Arizona. In just four decades, we have made great strides in promoting diversity in the legal profession, encouraging higher education in the Latino community, and advocating for the rights of Latinos,” says organization President Judith E. Dávila, Esq.

Founded in 1976 and incorporated in 1988, Los Abogados’ members include private and public attorneys, judges, community and business partners, paralegals and law students. Members practice throughout Arizona, and serve as officers and directors of county, state, and federal bar and civic associations. Los Abogados is also an affiliate member of the Hispanic National Bar Association (HNBA). Today, Los Abogados has more than 200 active members, including skilled lawyers and generous community partners who share a profound commitment to create positive change in the Latino community. Now entering its 43rd year, Los Abogados is larger, more influential, and more engaged and inspiring than it has ever been, Dávila says.

The founding members of Los Abogados were focused on increasing the number of Latino attorneys by building relationships and increasing their visibility and voice.

To increase the number of Latino attorneys, Los Abogados began raising money for law school scholarships. In 1988, Los Abogados created the Hon. Valdemar A. Cordova Scholarship, in honor of Arizona’s first Latino Federal Judge. The scholarship efforts developed into a broader goal to raise funds for endowed scholarships to ensure that they would be awarded in perpetuity. In 2015, Los Abogados achieved a decades-long goal, and created and funded a \$100,000 endowment at the ASU Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law, and through additional donations, this scholarship has grown.

In 2018, Los Abogados achieved the second phase of this goal, funding a \$100,000 endowment at the University of Arizona *James E. Rogers*’ College of Law. The scholarships are awarded to students who are active in and supportive of the Latino community, to alleviate the financial burden on students, and to hopefully inspire them to later pay it forward by continuing to support future law students and the Latino community.

These scholarships are funded by the generous support raised through the annual Spring Golf Tournament, and the Annual Fall awards Gala, both of which are well-received by all attendees and sponsors. In 2018, Los Abogados re-launched its Foundation, originally established in 2012. The Los Abogados Foundation established its separate Board of Directors, and looks forward to providing donors the benefit of contributing to a 501(c)(3) organization. Los Abogados also looks forward to expanding the education and scholarship programming through its new partnership with the Foundation.

In addition to scholarships, increasing diversity in the profession requires mentor-

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ship. In 2017, Los Abogados commenced the annual Los Abogados LSAT Fellowship Program, which provides 10 aspiring lawyers with a Kaplan LSAT prep course and mentorship through the law school application process. This mentorship program is critical to increasing the pipeline of diverse attorneys to the legal profession. Once an individual becomes a law student, Los Abogados continues assisting students successfully navigate through law school and transition to the practice of law. At the start of each semester, Los Abogados pairs interested students with attorney mentors. Often, these connections develop into strong professional and personal relationships that last well beyond the law school years. Los Abogados continues to expand its reach to the undergraduate, high school, and even middle school level to provide programming and inspiration to diverse students to consider a career in law, who might not otherwise be exposed to Latino lawyers.

Los Abogados' goal of increasing diversity does not stop in the schools; the effort continues as it provides support for attorneys who are interested in serving as judges. The Los Abogados Appointments Committee is dedicated to identifying and encouraging attorneys to apply to be judges and to serve in other leadership roles in the government and legal community, providing regular programming to demystify the judiciary and application process, being active in the committees and commissions involved in the appointment process, and to providing members' support and even mock interviews through the application process.

The Los Abogados Civil Rights and Legislative Committees have focused in many areas over the years, responding to the needs of the community. More recently, Los Abogados partnered with the ACLU to provide a free clinic on how to obtain legal compensation for members of the immigrant community victimized by MCSO's unlawful raids. In response to the family separation crisis, Los Abogados developed a mentorship program through which immigration attorney members mentor non-immigration pro bono attorneys on actual asylum cases. The Legislative Committee is a voice for our community at the State capitol, and is proud to have had its first bill signed into law in 2017 (SB 1422). Los Abogados continues to be actively involved in the policy-making processes that impact the community.

In addition to advocacy and philanthropy, one could almost forget that Los Abogados is a bar association. It hosts regular luncheon CLE programming on legal topics of current interest, and regular social and family events for members to connect and mingle. While it functions like many other bar associations, it is certainly unique in the impact it is making in the legal community and greater community in Arizona. The tremendous work of Los Abogados has not gone unnoticed. In 2018, Los Abogados received the Diversity and Inclusion Award by the Arizona State Bar, and the Affiliate Organization of the Year Award from the HNBA (also awarded in 2009 and 2010).

"We are a relatively new organization, but our achievements are a testament to the organization and to the many students, attorneys, judges, firms, and community partners at large who support our mission," Dávila says.

LOS ABOGADOS

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Latinas on the Rise

BY ASHLEY VILLAVERDE HALVORSON, LATINA COMMITTEE CO-CHAIR

The Los Abogados Latina Committee is proud to be celebrating its first year. Los Abogados, however, has historically been a place where Latinas in the profession have found support from one another.

It was many years ago when member, Hon. Mary Murguía, now serving on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, formed a Latina book club that evolved in positive ways over the years. In 2004, the group started the Latina Brunch, which for many years was hosted by long-time Latina lawyer champion, Maricopa County Superior Court Commissioner Mina Méndez (Ret.).

More recently, the brunch has been hosted by Los Abogados board members, a Fall Reception has been added to the annual agenda, and both events have always been well-attended by law students, lawyers and judges. The brunch was my first-ever Los Abogados event as a law student. It was both comforting—as as I did not otherwise see many students or attorneys who looked like me—and inspiring to see so many accomplished and diverse women coming together as friends and mentors.

With the growth of social media, so too rose the connections amongst Latinas in the group. Commissioner Méndez created a private Facebook group and Judge Murguía gave us an apt title: the Latina Mentoring Project. More than just a brunch or Facebook group, this network of 260 professional Latinas serves as a place to ask questions, find and offer jobs and mentorship opportunities, and

even score a last-minute ticket to a networking event. It has been a place for Latinas to find and encourage one another in a profession where we are statistically outnumbered by a staggering degree.

In 2018, it became clear that Los Abogados could do more to deliberately serve the needs of our Latina members. With the rise of the #MeToo movement, we reflected critically on our own policies, and made some changes that we believe are leading toward progress. One of those changes was the formation of a dedicated, standing Latina Committee. The Committee convened and we identified areas in which we could best serve our members, and developed the following mission:

“It is the mission of the Los Abogados Latina Committed to promote the inclusion and advancement of Latinas within Los Abogados and in the broader legal profession by: (1) providing professional and leadership development; (2) providing opportunities to connect with and support one another; and (3) providing recommendations to the Los Abogados board of directors as needed.”

The Committed has planned and hosted professional networking events, including a CLE regarding harassment in the workplace in the #MeToo era, and the Latina Power Hour, which will be a regular networking opportunity hosted throughout the year. We will continue providing high quality and relevant programming, and will continue to support the Latina Mentoring Project.

In addition to forming the Committee, Los Abogados amended its bylaws to include anti-harassment and anti-bullying policies. Los Abogados is Committed to providing an inclusive, open, and safe environment, and to supporting our members and any and all victims of harassment or abuse. Importantly, the Committed has made recommendations for making the complaint process more accessible and useful to members, and will continue to make important policy recommendations in various other contexts.

As a past president of Los Abogados, I am proud to have a circle of Latinas who have been a tremendous source of support for me professionally and personally. So while the Committee itself is fairly new, the network of Latina lawyers has always been strong. I attribute this to the trailblazers who recognized the importance of and have been generous in mentoring Latinas following in their footsteps. It is upon these incredible shoulders we stand, and the reason the committee looks forward to carrying on this legacy.



A PARTNER WITH JONES, SKELTON & HOCHULI, ASHLEY VILLAVERDE HALVORSON REPRESENTS INSURERS IN MATTERS INVOLVING BAD FAITH, INSURANCE COVERAGE, AND PERSONAL INJURY AND WRONGFUL DEATH. A PASSIONATE SUPPORTER OF DIVERSITY IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION, ASHLEY SERVES ON THE FIRM'S DIVERSITY & INCLUSION COMMITTEE, CHAIRS THE JSH DIVERSITY LEGAL WRITING PROGRAM, AND IS A DIRECTOR AND PAST PRESIDENT OF LOS ABOGADOS.



THE LATINA FALL RECEPTION HOSTED BY JONES, SKELTON & HOCHULI

The Balanced Eye of Justice

BY SHAYNA FERNANDEZ WATTS, APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE CO-CHAIR

Judges should reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. This is not a dream, whimsical illusion, or ideological concept. It is a founding principle set forth by the Arizona Constitution, Article VI, Section 37(C). The primary consideration being merit, the governor “shall consider the diversity of the state’s population” in appointing judges to the appellate courts statewide, including the Supreme Court, and trial court judges in Coconino, Maricopa, Pima and Pinal counties.

In 1992, Arizona voters approved Proposition 109, which called for the adoption of a process for evaluating the performance of the judiciary. The process, which we now know as “merit selection” has been the way forward for the Arizona judiciary for 27 years.

One of the reasons Arizona voters chose a merit-based selection of certain judges (instead of an election-based selection of certain judges) was to try to increase diversity of the bench. Did it work? Where are we now 27 years later? And what more can we do?

For a more complete analysis of where we are now, read the complete Bench Diversity Project: Second Annual Report, a joint effort of the Arizona Supreme Court Commission on Minorities in the Judiciary and the Administrative Offices of the Courts. This report, by lead author Professor Paul Bennet of the James E. Rogers

College of Law at the University of Arizona, highlights many important findings including the following:

- The Arizona State Court Judiciary does not reflect the categorical diversity of the state’s population. Whites are significantly over-represented on the bench. Minorities are under-represented.
- At all levels of court, Hispanics are significantly under-represented in the Arizona Judiciary.
- In both Juvenile Courts and Criminal Courts, there are significant disparities between the diversity of judicial officers and the populations they serve.
- Women continue to be underrepresented on the Bench in all courts, except for Superior Court commissioners where more women than men serve as judicial officers.
- Different courts show different diversity. Limited jurisdiction courts tend to be more diverse. Superior Court commissioners show much greater gender inclusion but are over 90% white.

This history and these facts propel and inform the Appointments committee for Los Abogados. The appointments Committee promotes the advancement of our members and other diverse candidates to the judiciary and other leadership positions in the legal community. The Committee provides confidential mentorship and guidance to candidates, includ-

ing connecting members with judges and conducting mock interviews. Los Abogados works to understand and assist judicial selection committees at all stages, including the nominating commissions and the Governor’s administration.

In addition, our committee hosts CLEs and judicial mentoring programs. This year we will be publishing a video series highlighting various pathways to the bench. Special thanks to Judge John Lopez (Arizona Supreme Court), Judge James Beene (Arizona Supreme Court), Judge Maria Elena Cruz (Arizona Court of Appeals), Judge Daniel Collins (U.S. Bankruptcy Court), Judge John Tuchi (U.S. District Court), Judge Sara Agne (Superior Court), and Judge Enrique Medina Ochoa (Justice of the Peace), for their participation in this important endeavor. I am proud to Co-Chair William Knight with the Appointment Committee.



SHAYNA FERNANDEZ WATTS IS AN EMPLOYMENT AND COMMERCIAL LITIGATION ATTORNEY AT RUSING LOPEZ & LIZARDI, PLLC, THE PROUD SPONSOR OF THIS ARTICLE AND OF LOS ABOGADOS. RL&L IS A PROMINENT LAW FIRM, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY TO SHAYNA IS THE FACT THAT THEY ARE AS COMMITTED AS SHE IS TO THE COMMUNITY AND TO EDUCATION. SHAYNA SERVES ON THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS FOR LOS ABOGADOS. SHAYNA WAS RECENTLY CHOSEN FROM A NATIONAL POOL OF CANDIDATES TO RECEIVE THE TOP LAWYERS UNDER 40 AWARD FROM THE HISPANIC NATIONAL BAR ASSOCIATION.

Shaping Policy

BY DANIEL A. ARELLANO, LEGISLATION COMMITTEE CHAIR

Recognizing its professional leadership role in the Arizona community, Los Abogados is committed to advocating for public policy that positively impacts its members and the Latino community. As lawyers, we have a unique understanding of how law and policy are made and how they shape lives. And as members of the Latino community, we recognize our solemn responsibility to serve as a voice for those whose voices are not often heard among the halls of power.

For years, Los Abogados has closely monitored legislation of interest at the Arizona Capitol. And for years this meant pushing back against blatantly anti-Latino laws, including the passage of SB 1070 and other laws that would have made it harder for members of our community to receive an education or obtain healthcare in Arizona. But it also meant advocating for legislation on which we could offer a unique perspective.

This included lobbying for a bill reigning in notarios, who operate as para-professional lawyers in Latin American countries but who are ill-equipped step into the shoes of lawyers in the United States. To Los Abogados, curbing the prevalence of notarios was a way to help protect our community. While we knew the challenges faced and the need for access to justice by members of the community, we also knew, as lawyers, of the dangers posed by untrained non-lawyers attempting to handle complex legal problems. Our committed advocacy led to the adoption of legislation that strengthened protections against this unique form of unauthorized practice of law.

Los Abogados also spearheaded the enactment of a law protecting victims of sex trafficking from exposure to prostitution charges—a concern raised by our members. The enacted law allows for vacating the criminal record of prostitution for victims of sex trafficking, allowing victims a path to lead a better life.

Daniel Arellano assumed the role of chair of the Legislation Committee in 2019. Practicing primarily in the areas of government affairs, election law, and appellate advocacy at Ballard Spahr LLP, Daniel has been well positioned to guide the organization's public advocacy

efforts. This includes helping guide public communications on policy matters, guiding the organization's advocacy strategy, and identifying key allies and stakeholders with whom to partner on matters of joint significance. For example, this legislative session, Los Abogados partnered with the Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project in opposing a bill that would have significantly limited who could file for dependency petitions in Arizona juvenile courts. The proposed change would have severely limited the ability to petition for dependency for unaccompanied minors—many of whom Los Abogados members represent as part of their pro bono work—and thereby cut off important avenues for immigration relief. Following the joint advocacy by the Florence Project and Los Abogados, the bill failed.

Los Abogados takes a multifaceted approach to influencing policy, focusing not just on the regulation of lawyers but also on the diversification of the profession and the advancement of civil rights. To that end, Los Abogados has and will continue to advocate for educational equity (including, in particular, for undocumented students), the advancement of minority voting rights, and criminal justice reform. This takes the form not just of lobbying legislators, but also working to influence executive agencies and commissions and advocating before the courts as *amici curiae* and as proponents of court rules that promote diversity and inclusiveness.

Our voice is an important one, and we seek to ensure it is heard in support of our members and our community. The legislation committee furthers that goal by identifying and influencing key decision makers across government.



DANIEL ARELLANO, AN ASSOCIATE AT BALLARD SPAHR, REPRESENTS CLIENTS IN GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS, COMPLEX LITIGATION, AND WHITE COLLAR CRIMINAL DEFENSE AND INVESTIGATIONS. AS PART OF HIS FOCUS ON POLITICAL AND ELECTION LAW, HE REPRESENTS CANDIDATES, DONORS, PACS, BALLOT MEASURE PROPONENTS, TRADE ASSOCIATIONS, NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS, AND CORPORATIONS IN COMPLIANCE, LITIGATION, AND ENFORCEMENT DEFENSE THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES.

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Los Abogados takes a multifaceted approach to influencing policy, focusing not just on the regulation of lawyers but also on the diversification of the profession and the advancement of civil rights.

- DANIEL A. ARELLANO



Laying a Foundation for the Future:

The Los Abogados LSAT Fellowship Program

BY JESSICA S. SANCHEZ, LOS ABOGADOS PAST PRESIDENT

The Los Abogados LSAT Fellowship Program increases diversity within the legal profession by helping diverse individuals overcome one major hurdle to law school admissions – the LSAT exam.

When I began my presidency in 2016, Los Abogados already had a long history of funding scholarships for Latino law students (I was a fortunate recipient of the Cordova Scholarship). Los Abogados has also long participated in many programs to inspire K-12 youth to pursue legal careers; however, no formal program existed to mentor those individuals applying to law school.

The Pipeline Committee was formed to implement strategic efforts to increase the number of Latinos in law school and to assist Latinos in the law school admissions process.

Daryl Gonzalez and Marcos Tapia, the founding Committee members, and I reflected on our own journeys and brainstormed different ideas for increasing the number of Latino law students. While the three of us had been admitted and became attorneys, we felt like we were the lucky ones.

Speaking for myself, my LSAT score was “good enough,” though certainly nothing to brag about. I purchased a self-study guide, because I could NOT justify spending \$1,000 on a preparation course when I had other immediate expenses such as tuition and rent. I also don’t believe I grasped how important getting the “best” score possible was to both admissions and scholarship opportunities.

Marcos and Daryl also regretted not having found a way to take a LSAT preparation course. Had we done so,

our “good enough” scores could have been “great enough” to merit scholarship funds. We also realized that a few points in our scores, could very well have resulted in our rejection to law school or having to have paid an exorbitant amount of money to attend an unaccredited or low-ranked school. It seemed so unfortunate that \$1,000 could be the difference for someone like us to be able to pursue their dream.

The Committee started with the idea of offering a few scholarships for LSAT preparation courses. A Kaplan representative encouraged us to consider providing the course to a cohort of individuals, along with mentorship, to make the course more impactful.

In 2017, with the support and donations from several members of the organization and community partners, we launched our first cohort of fellows. Twice per week, the ASU Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law donated the use of the “Los Abogados Conference Room” in the law library for the live instruction. On Saturdays, the fellows had the opportunity to visit participating law firms where a Los Abogados attorney proctored a practice LSAT exam. Towards the end of our program both ASU and UofA sent representatives from their admissions offices to talk about financial aid and the admissions process. Each student met with an admissions representative to discuss ways to put their best foot forward in their applications.

“The Los Abogados LSAT program is the reason I am able to go to law school,” says former Fellowship participant Jose Urteaga. “Before the program I was uninformed; both about

the LSAT/application process AND the nuances that come with attending law school. The program introduced me to the LSAT, helped prepare me, and welcomed me into a large support network here in Phoenix that I could rely on to guide me through applying and attending law school that you just can’t learn on your own. The program has made law school a thoughtful, and financially responsible decision. I am now ready to go to law school and join my mentors as a colleague.”

With the help of sustaining sponsors like Snell & Wilmer and Nunez & Associates, along with many generous donations from our members and community partners, our Program continues, and we are gearing up to launch our third cohort for 2019.

We are proud that several fellows are currently in law school or have recently been admitted, and we eagerly await the admissions results for several more. Other fellows are taking the tools that they received in the program to continue to improve their LSAT score before submitting an application. All of our fellows know they have our full support.

We are so thankful to all who made our vision a reality so that Los Abogados can continue to lay the foundation for the future.



JESSICA SANCHEZ IS A PARTNER WITH THE FIRM UDALL SHUMWAY PLC. SHE FOCUSES HER PRACTICE EXCLUSIVELY IN THE AREA OF EDUCATION LAW, REPRESENTING SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND CHARTER SCHOOLS THROUGHOUT THE STATE. IN ADDITION TO HER LEGAL PRACTICE, JESSICA IS VERY INVOLVED IN THE LEGAL AND GREATER COMMUNITY.

Inspiring Future Generations of Attorneys

BY MARCOS A. TAPIA, LOS ABOGADOS VICE PRESIDENT

In conjunction with the College of Law at ASU, Professor Charles Calleiros and with its national partner organization, the Hispanic National Bar Association, Los Abogados has long provided guidance, inspiration, and even sophisticated training to youth who we hope will be future members of the bar. A few notable outreach activities in the Phoenix area in just the last few months provide illustration.

In December 2018, dozens of attorneys from Los Abogados and from the visiting board of directors of the HNBA joined law students to visit 45 classes at two middle schools in southwest Phoenix, whose populations are approximately 75 percent Latinx. The mentors reached nearly 1,000 students, providing interactive classes on legal method to eighth-grade students, and presentations on the attorneys' path to their legal careers in sixth and seventh grade classes.

As a follow-up, more than 250 eighth graders from one of those schools traveled in separate groups in January and April 2019 to the state capitol to tour the legislature and hear presentations on the legislative process organized by a member of Los Abogados.

Whereas the middle school outreach program reaches hundreds of students, another mentoring program reaches a handful of high school students, but provides them with an invaluable prelaw experience that spans several months. Every November, ASU releases a moot court problem for a high school competition that will take place in March. This year the problem raised issues about reasonable cause to arrest a student in school, the scope of a student's right to free speech in that school, and the standards for affirming or reversing a trial court's grant of summary judgment in a civil rights suit. As an integral part of its prelaw program with the AGUILA Youth Leadership Institute, members of Los Abogados annually provide coaching for AGUILA stu-

dents who plan to compete in this moot.

AGUILA is a vibrant organization that each year attracts more than 200 college bound Latinx high school students in the Phoenix area. Its mission is “[t]o empower and prepare youth for college admission and graduation through a unique approach based upon a greater cultural understanding as a guide to personal, academic and professional excellence as future leaders.” Its members meet all day Saturday once a month for educational programming, and some of them meet extra hours for mentoring associated with certain professions, from engineering to law.

The AGUILA Prelaw Program conducted by Los Abogados is intensive – an introduction to legal method, followed by weeks of studying the moot court problem, and then helping each student develop arguments for one side, and finally practicing oral argument and answering judges' questions. As the competition nears, students and mentors begin to meet with increasing frequency, from twice a month to once a week or more.

Each year, AGUILA students have placed at or near the top of the ASU competition. More important, they gain a sense of maturity, accomplishment, and professionalism that is invaluable. The experience of mastering a legal case, dressing in professional attire, and arguing the case before attorneys posing as appellate judges is memorable at the least and at most is transformative. This year, one panel of judges stated that an AGUILA advocate was “amazing.” She and other AGUILA prelaw students will be among the future members of Los Abogados, reaching back to youth who follow in their footsteps.



MARCOS A. TAPIA IS A FORMERLY UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT WHO ARRIVED TO THE UNITED STATES FROM MEXICO WHEN HE WAS FIVE YEARS OLD. MARCOS IS AN ASSOCIATE AT TIFFANY & BOSCO PA WHERE HE IS PART OF THE CIVIL LITIGATION DEPARTMENT AND HE IS THE CURRENT VICE PRESIDENT FOR LOS ABOGADOS.

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- MARCOS A. TAPIA

