



## *Power of the Past, Force of the Future* 2019 HNBA National Awards Recipients

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

August 27, 2019

Washington, D.C. – The Hispanic National Bar Association (HNBA) is proud to announce the honorees of this year's prestigious annual National Awards, which will be presented during the 2019 HNBA/VIA Annual Convention Awards Reception, September 27, 2019, at the legendary Caroline's on Broadway in New York City.

"The theme of the 2019 HNBA Annual Convention is 'Power of the Past, Force of the Future.' This year's individual honorees are a distinguished group of exemplary attorneys that embody our theme. They are a mix of powerful trailblazers that have had a long career of many successes and those that are still relatively young in their careers but have hit their stride and are already movers and shakers. All of them have paved the way for so many, like our lifetime achievement award recipient, Maria Dantes Sanchez, who has been instrumental in mentoring so many law students. A decade and a half ago, Maria started a mentoring program in Miami, which she continues to run to this day. Then there is Latina Lawyer of the Year Award recipient Laura Peña. Laura has been in the trenches spending countless hours at the border and detention centers all across Texas to help asylum seekers and reunite families." said Jennifer Salinas, HNBA National President.

"I am also thrilled to recognize ABA Immediate Past President Bob Carlson. I couldn't think of anyone more fitting for the President's Award. Bob has been an incredible ally for our community and has taken hard stances against the Administration on its immigration 'policies.' In addition to our partnership with the ABA, we have other partners that have been instrumental in our success this year. Regional President of the Year Ben Sigel has broken all records in hosting numerous HNBA activities in Region 1 and has grown Region 1's membership by 148 percent. And, of course there is affiliate of the year, the Hispanic Bar Association of New Jersey (HBA-NJ). At the helm of HBA-NJ was Julia Lopez, and under her leadership, HBA-NJ broke its fundraising goals and was able to award more scholarships than it ever has in its 40 plus year history. And although we have many corporations and law firms that are great HNBA partners, one stood out this year more than any others. We could always count on partner of the year Holland & Knight for its support. In short, we are blessed to have had the opportunity to work with such ardent supporters and advocates for our community," said Salinas.

"We are pleased to honor and highlight the notable achievements of each of these individuals and organizations. I also want to thank Freddy Saavedra and the HNBA Awards Committee for their tireless work in vetting the award recipient nominees. ¡Felicidades a todos!"

### HNBA "Lifetime Achievement" Award



Maria C. Dantes Sanchez, Vice President & Regional General Attorney, Liberty Mutual Group  
Miami, FL

Maria Dantes Sanchez is Vice President and Regional General Attorney at Liberty Mutual Group. She is a member of the legal department's senior leadership, overseeing 24 field legal offices within 15 states and over 400 employees. Before joining Liberty Mutual, she worked for the Department of Justice as an Assistant General Attorney. Maria graduated magna cum laude from Nova University School of Law. She is the daughter of Cuban immigrants who instilled in her a strong work ethic, commitment to helping others, and a positive "can-do" attitude. These values helped her achieve professional excellence in her legal career while also driving her unwavering commitment to advancing and promoting the next generation of Latinx lawyers. She has been a long-standing member and leader of the HNBA holding various leadership roles including Vice President of Regions & Affiliates and Region VIII President. She received the HNBA Regional President of the Year award in 2016, and she is also the incoming General Counsel for the HNBA. Maria is the founder of the HNBA Mentoring Program in Florida on which the HNBA's national mentoring program was modeled. She has led that program for over 15 years with hundreds of law students benefiting from participation. Maria's commitment, selfless dedication and countless contributions to the betterment of so many are a true legacy.

### HNBA President's Award

*\*This award will be presented during Gala on Saturday, Sept. 28th.*



Robert M. Carlson, Shareholder & ABA Immediate Past President, Corette Black Carlson & Mickelson, P.C.  
Butte, MT

Bob Carlson, a shareholder with the Butte, Montana, law firm of Corette Black Carlson & Mickelson, P.C., is Immediate Past President of the American Bar Association. Carlson has served in many national and state bar leadership positions, including as president of the State Bar of Montana (1993-94) and Chair of the ABA's House of Delegates (2012- 14). He served two terms on the ABA Board of Governors and its Executive Committee, and has served in the ABA House of Delegates since 1999.

Carlson's ABA leadership positions include chair of the ABA Day in Washington and the Standing Committee on Meetings and Travel, and as a member of the Standing Committee on Bar Activities and Services and Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Profession. Carlson's civil trial and mediation practice primarily involves insurance defense, products liability and insurance coverage.

### **HNBA "Judge of the Year" Award**



Hon. Jeffrey M. Bryan, Trial Court Judge, Second Judicial District, Minnesota Judicial Branch  
Saint Paul, MN

Governor Mark Dayton appointed Judge Bryan in 2013. After graduating from Yale Law School, Judge Bryan was a civil litigation attorney at Robins, Kaplan, and an Assistant United States Attorney for the District of Minnesota. Judge Bryan serves on several committees with the Minnesota Hispanic Bar Association, volunteers as a Board Member for Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity and the Minnesota Urban Debate League, and represents the Minnesota Judicial Branch on the Minnesota Supreme Court Rules of Evidence Advisory Committee and the Tribal Court-State Court Forum. Since 2016, Judge Bryan has helped lead efforts to reform the juvenile justice system in Ramsey County. In the last three years, the average daily population at the county juvenile detention facility decreased by 45%, the average length of stay decreased by 27%, and the average number of youth placed outside the home upon disposition decreased by approximately 80%.

### **HNBA "Latina Attorney of the Year" Award**



Laura Peña, Immigration Attorney, South Texas Pro Bono Asylum Representation Project (ProBAR)  
Brownsville, TX

Laura Peña is an immigration lawyer with a wide-range of legal and foreign policy experience. She is a former Obama appointee who served at the U.S. State Department (2009–2012), focusing on U.S. policies impacting Central America. Laura later became an Assistant Chief Counsel with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE"). She served as an immigration prosecutor in Los Angeles and San Diego (2014–2016) during the "border surge" of migrant women and children. Following a brief period in private practice, Laura publicly disavowed ICE when the family separation crisis hit. In a widely-read USA Today op-ed, she criticized her former agency stating, "I became a lawyer because I believe in the rule of law and fundamental fairness, not to prosecute babies and send them traveling in planes alone...We are witnessing mass violations of constitutional and international laws that uphold the rights [sic] of children to live free from harm." After eighteen years away from her border hometown, Laura went back to the Rio Grande Valley, joining the Texas Civil Rights Project's efforts to reunify families separated by the U.S. government.

Based on nine months of on-the-ground family reunification efforts fighting for dozens of families, Laura authored the first comprehensive, non-governmental report on family separations. The report, "The Real National Emergency: Zero Tolerance & The Horrors of Family Separation," was

widely cited by news media outlets and introduced into the official record of Congressional hearings on family separations. Laura currently works as the pro bono manager for the American Bar Association Commission on Immigration. She is based at ProBAR, the ABA's largest asylum project, located in the Rio Grande Valley. Laura lives in Brownsville, Texas with her blue heeler dog Dulce and frequently volunteers at the local refugee shelters to provide legal assistance to asylum-seeking families.

#### **HNBA "Latino Attorney of the Year" Award**



Ernesto Rafael Palomo, Partner, Locke Lord LLP  
Chicago, IL

Ernesto Palomo is a Litigation Partner at Locke Lord and Co-Chair of the Firm's Diversity and Inclusion Committee. He has extensive experience representing large multinational companies in court and in commercial arbitration proceedings around the country. Ernesto also counsels clients on issues of insurance and reinsurance coverage and has represented domestic and overseas insurers and reinsurers in coverage disputes. Earlier this year, on behalf of LatinoJustice PRLDEF and 15 other national Latino organizations, including the HNBA, Ernesto filed an amicus brief with the U.S. Supreme Court opposing the addition of a citizenship question to the 2020 U.S. Census. Ernesto also devotes considerable time to pro bono matters through the National Immigrant Justice Center, the Center for Disability and Elder Law and Chicago Volunteer Legal Services. He received his J.D. from University of Illinois College of Law and his B.A. from University of Illinois.

#### **HNBA "Regional President of the Year" Award**



Benjamin R. Sigel, Director of Client and Community Relations – Special Counsel, Mintz  
Boston, MA

Ben is currently the Director of Client and Community Relations at Mintz, a national AMLaw 100 law firm, where he coordinates and supports the efforts of the firm's client and community relations activities. Ben is an experienced litigator and legal advisor, focusing on a wide range of litigation matters. He graduated from Middlebury College and received his M.B.A. from American University Kogod School of Business and J.D. from American University Washington College of Law. Ben has been married to his amazing wife Gabrielle for 18 years and has 4 equally amazing children (Harrison, Siona, Vivienne and Francesca).

Ben is the current Regional President of HNBA Region I and sits on the HNBA Board of Governors. During this past year, with the assistance of the Region I Leadership Team, Ben helped reinvigorate HNBA in New England, organizing and sponsoring over 40 events, including 10 community service

events and 15 new events, including a Leveraging Latinidad Series of 3 events focused on Latinx professionals in Big Firm, In-House and Public Interest and Government, a Celebrating Latinx Women event, Mock Interview and Resume Review Session, a Celebrating Latinx Politician event and a Summer Soiree. Region I also partnered with over 60 new organizations on these events and signed-up 17 new HNBA Associate Organizations and 1 new HNBA Affiliate Organization from its Region. Since the 2018 HNBA/VIA Annual Convention, Region I has added 150+ new HNBA members, increased its email list by over 600 people and added 7 new regional sponsors.

#### **HNBA "Pro Bono Attorney of the Year" Award**



Monica Welby, Deputy Director of Litigation, Legal Action Center  
New York, NY

Monica Welby will be joining Goddard Law PLLC in New York City this September where she will be representing individuals who suffer discrimination and retaliation in the workplace. Most recently, Monica was the Deputy Director of Litigation at the Legal Action Center (LAC), a non-profit organization whose mission is to fight discrimination against people with criminal records, substance use disorders, or HIV/AIDS. During her close to eight-year tenure at LAC, Monica was actively involved in the development of impact litigation to expand the rights of people who experience discrimination based on their criminal records and the violation of their health privacy rights.

Prior to LAC, Monica was an associate at Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP for several years. She also served as a law clerk to the Honorable Barry T. Albin of the Supreme Court of New Jersey. She received her J.D. from Rutgers School of Law – Newark, and her A.B. from Duke University.

#### **HNBA "Partner of the Year" Award** **Holland & Knight**

Holland & Knight LLP  
Philadelphia, PA

Holland & Knight's culture of inclusion and reputation for high quality client service are built on principles of collaboration and collegiality. These principles drive the firm's Diversity & Inclusion initiative and its tradition of pro bono work and bar association participation. With more than 1,300 lawyers across 28 offices, H&K is a full service law firm that provides our lawyers – including those traditionally underrepresented in the profession – with opportunities to achieve professional success and work-life balance. Our Diversity & Inclusion initiative, mentoring and training programs are critical to that success.

H&K is a long-time sponsor of the HNBA and a leader among major U.S. firms in recruiting Hispanic lawyers – nearly 10% of our U.S. lawyers identify as Hispanic. Our Hispanic Affinity Group is instrumental in retaining, promoting and empowering these lawyers. We are proud of our diversity and grateful to be recognized as the 2019 HNBA Partner of the Year.

### HNBA "Affiliate of the Year" Award



H I S P A N I C  
B A R  
A S S O C I A T I O N

Hispanic Bar Association of New Jersey (HBA-NJ)  
Newark, NJ

For nearly 40 years, the Hispanic Bar Association of New Jersey (HBA-NJ) has been the voice of the Hispanic legal community and community at large in NJ. The HBA-NJ had a record-breaking year, while celebrating its members' accomplishments through its annual theme, Diversity Makes America Great and organizing vibrant initiatives and programs. The HBA-NJ awarded \$102,000, half of which was awarded directly to Hispanic students and half of which formed the initial contribution to the HBA-NJ's very first endowment. It had robust CLE programs, including the 18th Annual Sun, Surf & Seminars in Antigua, Guatemala and the 9th Annual Corporate Counsel Roundtable. It also empowered Latinas at the Women's Empowerment Leadership and Law Conference, including a special presentation by the Hon. Esther Salas, U.S.D.J. who read a "Letter To My Younger Self." The HBA-NJ also offered community panels to educate the Hispanic community about their legal rights and issued impactful press releases on issues affecting our community. It held another successful mentorship program at our NJ law schools, as well as at two urban high schools through its American Dream Pipeline Program. Finally, the dynamic Young Lawyers Committee organized several networking mixers and a Summer of Service Program where attorneys engaged in community service.

### HNBA "Law Student Organization of the Year" Award



Chicano/Latino Law Students Association (CLLSA) at Arizona State University  
Phoenix, AZ

The Chicano/Latino Law Students Association (CLLSA) of the Sandra Day O' Connor College of Law at Arizona State University is a powerful student organization that has been promoting and encouraging the Latino law student for over 35 years. The goal of CLLSA is to advance the status of Latinos in the social, educational and legal areas; to promote and encourage the education of the Latino law student; and to sensitize the legal community to the unique needs of the Latino community. CLLSA partners with many community organizations, such as the Los Abogados Hispanic Bar Association, to provide its members with career perspectives, mentorship opportunities, law firm visits, and other tools for law school success. CLLSA also provides student-to-student peer mentoring opportunities, and events where Latino law students get to spend time outside of the classroom with ASU Law faculty. On a more holistic and inclusive level, CLLSA's signature event, the Fajita Cookoff, brings together hundreds of attorneys, law students, and community partners every year to fundraise money for its traditional book scholarship. This year, CLLSA hosted the 34th Annual Fajita Cookoff and was able to gift \$15,000 in the form of book

scholarships for its members. Additionally, due to this year's success, CLLSA was able to implement its first ever 3L Bar Scholarship program and awarded three graduating members with \$800 grants to ease the burden of bar prep and graduation expenses.

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**About the Hispanic National Bar Association**

The Hispanic National Bar Association (HNBA) is an incorporated, not-for-profit, national membership association that represents the interests of Hispanic attorneys, judges, law professors, legal assistants, law students, and legal professionals in the United States and its territories. Since 1972, the HNBA has acted as a force for positive change within the legal profession by creating opportunities for Hispanic lawyers and by helping generations of lawyers to succeed. The HNBA has also effectively advocated on issues of importance to the national Hispanic community. While we are proud of our accomplishments, we are mindful that our mission is as vital today as it was four decades ago, especially as the U.S. Hispanic population continues to grow. For more information, please visit [www.hnba.com](http://www.hnba.com).

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**About the HNBA VIA ("Vision in Action") Fund**

The HNBA VIA ("Vision in Action") Fund is the Hispanic National Bar Association's 501 (c)(3) charitable arm. The HNBA VIA Fund's mission is to empower the U.S. Latinx community through programs and initiatives that increase the community's access and influence, and provide expanded education, career advancement, and leadership opportunities. Through a combination of targeted programmatic activities (trainings, workshops, mentoring and pipeline programs, pro bono legal services, conferences, and more!), HNBA VIA, as a joint enterprise with the HNBA, supports the development and advancement of Latinx students, legal professionals and community members. Please consider VIA when deciding where to invest your or your organization's charitable support! You may also consider partnering with the HNBA VIA Fund to advance your organization's Latinx diversity and inclusion or corporate citizenship programs and initiatives. For more information, please visit [www.hnba.com/hnbaviafund/](http://www.hnba.com/hnbaviafund/).