

2011 Haywood Burns Memorial Award Reception

Honoring

Cesar A. Perales

President and General Counsel of LatinoJustice PRLDEF



Cesar A. Perales

Cesar A. Perales is one of the founders of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund, now known as LatinoJustice PRLDEF. He currently serves as President and General Counsel.

Under his leadership, LatinoJustice PRLDEF has litigated impact cases that have improved the way Latinos are treated in our society. These cases have established the right to bilingual education, struck down civil service requirements keeping Latinos from public employment, and eliminated barriers to government benefits for non-English speakers. In 1975 Congress amended the Voting Rights Act to include the right to bilingual ballots—a right established by LatinoJustice PRLDEF in New York in 1973.

Mr. Perales' record of government and private-sector service has also been extraordinary. He was nominated by President Jimmy Carter and confirmed by the U.S. Senate to serve as Assistant Secretary in the Department of Health and Human Services. As Commissioner of the Department of Social Services under Governor Mario M. Cuomo, he managed New York State's largest agency budget. He went on to serve as Deputy Mayor of New York City during the administration of David N. Dinkins. After leaving public service he became Senior Vice

President of Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center; the Community Health Care system he developed during his tenure received national recognition.

Under Cesar's current tenure as President and General Counsel of LatinoJustice, the organization has gained new prominence as an advocate and defender of the rights of immigrants. After Hazleton, PA passed an ordinance to punish landlords who rented to undocumented immigrants, LatinoJustice sued Hazleton, saying the ordinance was unconstitutional. On July 26, 2007, a federal court agreed and struck down the Hazleton ordinance. In 2008, LatinoJustice sued the United States Government for delays in the processing of immigration applications, and filed an unusual international petition with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States, charging that the United States was failing to protect Latinos living within its borders and was thus falling short of several human rights manifestos.

Last year, LatinoJustice was thrust into the national spotlight when President Obama nominated former PRLDEF board member Sonia Sotomayor to be a Justice of the Supreme Court. When Sotomayor came under attack because of her long service on PRLDEF's board, Cesar took on her detractors and described how she had acted in the highest traditions of the legal profession.

The son of a Puerto Rican father and a Dominican mother, Mr. Perales received his bachelor's degree from City College and is a graduate of Fordham Law School.