



# Houston's Legacy



A Newsletter of the PBA Minority Bar Committee • Fall 2021

## Celebrating National Hispanic Heritage Month: Spotlighting Our Hispanic Federal Jurists

*By Deborah Winokur, Esq. and Andrea Farney, Esq. for the Women in the Profession Diversity Committee*

The 30-day period from Sept. 15, 2021 – Oct. 15, 2021 is the annual celebration of National Hispanic Heritage Month, an opportunity to focus on and observe the contributions of Americans with origins from Spain, Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Caribbean and Central and South America. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the National Hispanic Heritage Week bill into law in September 1968. Twenty years later, the bill was expanded into a month-long observance under Ronald W. Reagan. According to California Rep. Esteban Torres, an early supporter of efforts to extend the timeframe, “[w]e want the public to know that we share a legacy with the rest of the country, a legacy that includes artists, writers, Olympic champions, and leaders in business, government, cinema and science.”

We are also mindful that there is a gap in Hispanic representation in the bar, where Hispanic attorneys make up only 1.53% of the profession as compared to 7% of Pennsylvania's overall population, according to data from the Pennsylvania attorney registration process and the U.S. Census. We encourage all of our attorneys to celebrate National Hispanic Heritage Month and seize this opportunity this month and always, to broaden the bar's reach.

In Rep. Torres' spirit, we seek to recognize the incredible accomplishments and contributions of our Hispanic jurists, some of whom are profiled here.

### Judge Julio Fuentes, Senior U.S. Circuit Judge on the Third Circuit Court of Appeals

Prior to his federal service, Judge Fuentes worked as a judge in the Newark Municipal Court and then as a judge in the New Jersey Superior Court in Essex County. Born in Humacao, Puerto Rico, he moved with his family to New York and grew up in Toms River, New Jersey. He obtained his bachelor's degree from Southern Illinois University and served in the U.S. Army from 1966-1969. He was honorably discharged with the rank of First Lieutenant. He earned a Master of Arts degree in Latin American Studies from New York University and his J.D.



*Judge Julio Fuentes*

from the University of Buffalo Law School.

In 1999, President Bill Clinton nominated him to the Third Circuit Court of Appeals. He assumed his commission in 2000 becoming the first Hispanic American male appointed as a judge of the Third Circuit. Judge Fuentes, a former high school athlete, played football and wrestled. In 2006, Judge Fuentes was inducted into the National Wrestling Hall of Fame!

### Judge Luis Felipe Restrepo, U.S. Circuit Judge on the Third Circuit Court of Appeals



*Judge Luis Felipe Restrepo*

Judge Restrepo is the former District Judge of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. Born in Medellín, Columbia, Judge Restrepo grew up in northern Virginia and became a U.S. citizen in 1993. He attended the University of Pennsylvania and Tulane Law School.

Judge Restrepo has a varied legal background prior to assuming the bench. He began his legal careers as a law clerk with the American Civil Liberties Union National Prison Project. He then served as an assistant public defender in state and federal court, first with the Defender Association of Philadelphia and then with the Federal Defender's Office in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. He had his own private practice and then became a U.S. magistrate judge.

In November 2012, President Barack Obama nominated Judge Restrepo to serve as a U.S. District Judge. Two years later, Obama nominated him to serve on the Third Circuit. Restrepo

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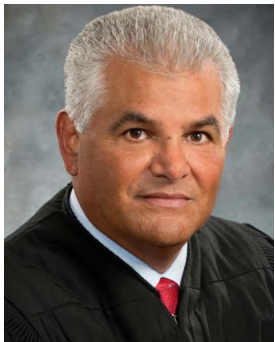
## Spotlighting Our Hispanic Federal Jurists

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began his commission on the Third Circuit in 2016.

Judge Restrepo also assists the profession by teaching. He taught trial advocacy at Temple University Beasley School of Law and the University of Pennsylvania Law School. He co-founded a re-entry program for individuals with violent criminal records returning home to Philadelphia. The program, referred to as Supervision to Aid Re-Entry or STAR, is meant to offer community, hope and a guide to resources for individuals starting out again after serving long prison terms.

### Judge Juan R. Sánchez



*Judge Juan R. Sánchez*

Nominated by President George W. Bush, Judge Juan R. Sánchez was inducted to the District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania on July 9, 2004. In 2018, he became chief judge, the first Hispanic Chief Judge in the court's history.

Born in Puerto Rico, Chief Judge Sánchez moved to the Bronx, New York at age 12 where he learned to speak English. He credits his love of baseball for facilitating his transition

to life in New York and teaching him the value of teamwork and discipline. The life and death of baseball legend and humanitarian Roberto Clemente helped Chief Judge Sánchez to envision his own future in service. He obtained his bachelor's degree from the City University of New York City College, where he also played baseball. He attended the University of Pennsylvania School of Law where he received the Benjamin R. Jones Award for commitment to humanity and the law.

Chief Judge Sánchez earned a fellowship to work at Legal Aid of Chester County. He spent 14 years as a Chester County public defender. He was elected to the Chester County Court of Common Pleas in 1997.

From his early routes with Aspira Clubs, whose mission is "[t]o empower the Puerto Rican and Latino community through advocacy, education and youth leadership development," Chief Judge Sánchez has been a role model and dedicated public servant.

### Judge Nitza I. Quiñones Alejandro

Nominated by Pres. Barack Obama on Nov. 27, 2012, Judge Quiñones Alejandro was inducted to the District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania on June 13, 2013. Judge Quiñones Alejandro was born in Puerto Rico and grew



*Judge Nitza I. Quiñones*

Judge Quiñones Alejandro graduated with a Bachelor of Business Administration with honors from the University of Puerto Rico. She studied law at University of Puerto Rico School of Law.

During a challenging first year of law school, she questioned her decision to pursue law school. Judge Quiñones Alejandro found her sense of purpose working part-time at a legal services clinic in San Juan. Following graduation, she accepted a position with Community Legal Services of Philadelphia where she spent two years before becoming an attorney advisor at the Social Security Administration. The Department of Veterans Affairs poached Judge Quiñones Alejandro, where she became the first female attorney in the office.

After spending more than 10 years with Veterans Affairs, Judge Quiñones Alejandro resigned to run for a position on the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas. Political advisors suggested shortening her name of the ballot to eliminate "Quiñones" as a way to assimilate and seem "less Latina." Judge Quiñones Alejandro refused to do so and won the election as an unconfirmed and unendorsed candidate. She became the first female Hispanic judge in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. When attorneys in her courtroom attempted to use her inexperience as a judge to run roughshod over opponents or her, she reminded them, "In my [courtroom], no one raises their voice above mine."

In pursuing consideration for the federal bench in 2012, Judge Quiñones Alejandro made the decision to disclose her sexual orientation to the nomination committee. She was confirmed seven months later with the distinction of being the first openly gay Hispanic person to be confirmed to the federal bench. However, she wrote, "[w]hile I was, and always will be, proud of the fact that I am Latina, gay and a woman [], I had never defined myself by any of those characteristics."

*Andrea C. Farney's and Deborah Winokur's bios are on page 3.*



*Andrea C. Farney is a founding partner of Triquetra Law,® a plaintiff's law firm in Lancaster, focusing exclusively on employment law, civil rights and appeals. Her employment practice concentrates on discrimination, retaliation and harassment cases, separation and severance agreements, unemployment compensation, and family and medical leave. She represents both public and private employees in all phases of litigation, administrative processes, alternative dispute resolution and appeal. She primarily practices in the Eastern and Middle Districts of Pennsylvania and is admitted in the Third Circuit and the U.S Supreme Court.*



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