



HONORING THE PAST - EMBRACING THE FUTURE

Top row, from left to right: **Adelfa Callejo** – First female Hispanic practitioner in Dallas; **Alberto Gonzales** – First Hispanic US Attorney General (2005-2007); **Gustavo C. Garcia** – Together with Carlos Cadena, first Hispanic Attorney to argue before U.S. Supreme Court in the landmark case *Hernández v. Texas* (1954); **Richard Peña** – First Hispanic to serve as State Bar President of Texas (1998-1999); **Justice Eva Guzman** – First Hispanic Woman on Texas Supreme Court (2009-present); Bottom row, from left to right: **Justice Raul A. Gonzalez, Jr.**, – First Hispanic appointed or elected to statewide office in Texas; first Hispanic on Texas Supreme Court (1984-1998); SBOT President **J. Chrys Dougherty** with founding members/leaders of the Concerns of the Spanish Speaking Community Section: James W. Ray, Jr., J. Manuel Banales, Hon. Reynaldo G. Garza and Frank Herrera (1980); **Linda Reyna Yañez** – Appointed by Gov. Ann Richards in 1993, the first Hispanic woman to serve on an appeals court in the history of the State of Texas and the first woman to serve on the 13th Court of Appeals; **Carlos Cadena** – Together with Gustavo C. Garcia, the first Hispanic attorney to argue before U.S. Supreme Court in the landmark case *Hernández v. Texas* (1954).

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Chair's Report

Happy New Year!

As you read this, the year is in full swing and probably through the first quarter! It astounds me how quickly time passes even when the moments appear to drag. I wasn't sure I'd make it out of January, but here we are!

We are mid-way through the process of changing our Section name to the Hispanic Lawyers Section. The members unanimously approved the change at the special meeting called on December 11th. It was a historic meeting attended by many former HIS chairs and HIS and SBOT leaders. On behalf of the Section, I was so honored to hear their feedback and receive their support. The process continues, requiring approval from the Council of Chairs and Section Representatives before being submitted to the full SBOT Board. With excitement, we are hoping to kick off next year under the new name and branding, but without change to the Section's mission, our commitment to serve our members, and our focus on the issues that confront our larger community.



Chief Justice Maria Salas Mendoza

Along with our launch, reception, and awards presentation, we have some fantastic continuing education planned for Annual Meeting. HIS programming begins on June 19th at 1pm with Thomas Saenz (MALDEF) and Prof. Rogelio Saenz (UT San Antonio) speaking on "Voting Rights and the Latino Electorate." This session will be moderated by Section secretary Isaac Faz. Next, treasurer Augie Rivera will moderate a panel presentation "Emerging Trends in Legal Education," a very

HIS encourages the submission of items for future newsletters. These can be sent to Elma Garcia at egarcia@texasbar.com.

Message from the Chair
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timely discussion featuring Prof. Rachel Moran (Texas A&M School of Law), Dean Patricia Roberts (St. Mary's School of Law) and Dean Reynaldo Valencia (South Texas College of Law). Thank you to Gloria Leal for graciously moderating a legislative update with Representative Romero Roman (Chair, Mexican American Legislative Caucus; District 90, Ft. Worth) and Representative Maria Luisa "Lulu" Flores (District 51, Austin). To join the Section at these events, you will need to register for the SBOT Annual Meeting at the following link www.texasbar.com/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Annual_Meeting&Template=/customsource/redirects/amredirect.cfm Do it quickly as the rooms sell out! You won't want to miss our events!

We have great CLE programming and events throughout the year. CLE programs throughout the year are free to members and recordings of our Fall programs and the February 20th presentation, Pioneer of Mexican-American Civil Rights: Alonso S. Perales, by Dr. Cynthia Orozco can be accessed online on the Section's website at <https://texashispanicissuessection.com/cle/>.

Finally, plan to join us for our Legislative Update, a joint program with the Mexican American Bar Association of Texas, on March 26th, 2025, at the Texas Law Center. Law students will be in attendance and the Section is finalizing programming to support students on their legal journey.

Lots going on! We invite you to join our programs and get more involved in the Section's work – to do so, just reach out to me! I look forward to seeing you soon.

HIS Council Meets in El Paso

In conjunction with the investiture of Section Chair Chief Justice Maria Salas Mendoza, the Section Council met in El Paso in January at the Eighth Court of Appeals. At the meeting, the Council discussed current priorities including the section name change, member recruitment, CLE events, and developing programming for the SBOT Annual Meeting.

Council Members gathered for the quarterly in-person meeting in El Paso.



Section Name Change Approved by Membership

At a special Section meeting held in December, the membership voted on and approved a name change for the section to Hispanic Lawyers Section. Following Section approval, the name change will be considered by the Council of Chairs and the SBOT Board. Once the approval process is complete, the Section intends to introduce the name change and new logo at the Annual Meeting in San Antonio.

Section Chair Maria Salas Mendoza sworn in as Chief Justice of Eighth Court of Appeals

Section Chair Maria Salas Mendoza was sworn in as Chief Justice of the Eighth Court of Appeals in a ceremony in El Paso in January. Previously, Chief Justice Salas Mendoza served 18 years as judge of the 120th District Court. The Chief Justice was sworn in by Section member and former chair Justice Gina Benavides. The ceremony was attended by several members of the HIS council, in El Paso for the Council meeting, as well as other section leaders and members.



Chief Justice Maria Salas Mendoza is sworn in by Justice Gina Benavides.



Chief Justice Maria Sala Mendoza pictured with judicial attendees at her swearing-in ceremony

Section Collaborates with MABA Texas to Host Legislative Update

Together with the Mexican American Bar Association of Texas, the Section is hosting a Legislative Update on March 26th at the Texas Law Center. Topics include an update on litigation and voting rights, a discussion on the intersection of criminal and immigration law, and highlights from the current legislative session. A reception will follow at the end of the session.

To Register, or for more details, Contact: MABATX2023@gmail.com.

The \$100.00 registration fee includes 5.50 hr. CLE/Ethics credit, lunch and entry to the reception.

Dues Increase

The Section Council voted for, and the State Bar Board has approved, a dues increase for the section starting next Bar year. Currently, membership dues are \$20 and the increase will bring dues to \$25. This slight increase will bring the section's dues in line with other similar sized sections and will serve to further support the Section's work.

Save The Date: SBOT Annual Meeting

Annual Meeting is just around the corner! Scheduled for June 19-20, the Annual Meeting will take place at the J.W. Marriott Hill Country Resort in San Antonio. Section programming, including CLE sessions covering current trends in legal education, voting rights, and a legislative update, will take place on June 19th. A Section meeting and reception will also be held. [Register today!](#)



Call for Nominations

The Section is soliciting nominations for its annual awards to be presented at Annual Meeting in June. Nominations are due April 4th and details on each award can be found below. The Nominations form can be found [here](#):

The **Reynaldo G. Garza Lifetime Achievement Award** recognizes an attorney or judge who is a member in good standing of the State Bar of Texas that has demonstrated a long commitment to and made great achievement in addressing concerns and issues affecting the Hispanic community and to the Hispanic Bar in Texas and has worked toward advancing diversity and access to justice in the practice of law. The award is named after the Honorable Reynaldo G. Garza, who became the United States' first Mexican-American federal judge when he was appointed by President John F. Kennedy to the United States District Court for the Southern District of Texas in 1961. Judge Garza was later nominated by President Jimmy Carter to serve on the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit in 1979 and served on that court until his death in 2004. Additional information about Judge Garza may be found [here](#).

The **Pete Torres, Jr. Community Service Award** recognizes an individual or organization that has demonstrated a history of legal service and commitment to the Hispanic community. The award is named after Peter Torres, Jr., the first Chair of the Hispanic Issues Section (when it was known as "Concerns of the Spanish Speaking Community"). Mr. Torres practiced law for over 40 years and was a former city councilman of San Antonio. He received a variety of awards honoring his long service to San Antonio as well as to the overall Hispanic community in Texas, including the MABA-TX Lifetime Achievement Award, the Hispanic Issues Section Reynaldo G. Garza Lifetime Achievement Award, and the St. Mary's Law Alumni Association Henry B. Gonzalez Award.

The **James W. Wray, Jr. Founder's Award** recognizes exceptional achievements on behalf of the Hispanic legal community. The award was named after its first honoree, Mr. James W. Wray, Jr. of Corpus Christi. Mr. Wray's incredible effect on the Hispanic legal community in Texas cannot be measured. He helped to create, along with the work of several others while facing what has been described as vitriolic opposition, the predecessor organization to the current Hispanic Issues Section.

The **Professor Michael Olivas Education Excellence Award** recognizes excellence in legal education. The award was named after and posthumously awarded to Professor Michael Olivas, who was the William B. Bates Distinguished Chair of Law and director of the Institute for Higher Education Law and Governance at the University of Houston Law Center where he served on the faculty for 38 years before his retirement in 2019. Professor Olivas was a national leader on immigration legal scholarship and recognized for his extensive writing on Latino civil rights.

Notable Events and Happenings



ABA Impacto Award – Section member and former Chair **Betty Balli Torres** was named a recipient of the inaugural ABA Impacto Award. According to the ABA, the award, presented in January at the ABA Mid-year meeting, honors an individual or organization that has impacted efforts to remove the significant legal, socio-economic, linguistic, and other barriers to social justice and civic engagement facing Latinos in the U.S. Balli Torres, who remains active with the Section, currently serves as the Executive Director of the Texas Access to Justice Foundation and leads the Section’s Access to Justice efforts.

Betty Balli Torres pictured with Louis Lopez, Chair of the Commission on Hispanic Legal Rights and Responsibilities

TCWLA Pathfinders Award – Section member and former Chair **Gloria Leal** was recognized at the Travis County Women Lawyers’ Association with the Pathfinder Award. The award, presented at the annual TCWLA luncheon, recognizes local women with law degrees who represent a diversity of life and career experiences and have used their degrees in a variety of ways to impact the community and the legal profession. Leal, a Government Affairs consultant, continues to actively serve in the Section.



Gloria Leal (Center), Pictured with Justice Gina Benavides (L) and Judge Rosie Speedlin Gonzalez (R) at the Pathfinder Awards Luncheon



Rep. Ana Hernandez – At the commencement of the 89th Legislative Session, State Representative Ana Hernandez, who began her 20th year in the House of Representatives, became the longest serving Latina in the Texas House. Representative Hernandez also practices law in Houston, Texas.

Calendar

March 26th

Legislative Update, Co-Sponsored by the Mexican American Bar Association of Texas
 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. CST
 HIS In-person Council Meeting to follow CLE
 Texas Law Center

April 9th

HIS Virtual Council Meeting, 12:30 p.m. CST

June 19th

SBOT Annual Meeting, HIS Annual Section Meeting and CLE, with reception to follow
 J.W. Hill Country Marriott, San Antonio, 1:00 p.m. CST