June 1, 2013

Selection Committee

The National LGBT Bar Association

1301 K Street NW Suite 1100

East Tower Washington, DC 2000

Dear Selection Committee,

On behalf of California Rural Legal Assistance, I am honored to offer my support of Dan Torres for The Best LGBT Lawyers Under 40, Class of 2013.

Dan came to California Rural Legal Assistance Inc in 2010. His role, as the Director of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Program at California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc. has been critical to shifting the culture of an entire organization. Dan’s work, as an attorney, as an advocate, as an educator has helped CRLA stay on the cutting edge of civil rights work in rural California. His work, with schools districts, public health officials, and law enforcement agencies have made a tangible, lived difference in the day to day lives of LGBT rural residents. His skills as an attorney make him a formidable opponent in the courtroom, but he is always willing to negotiate in the best interests of his clients.

Another critical way Dan is worthy of this honor is his deep commitment to creating culture change within the Latino community. Dan, a Mexican American, was born and raised in rural Washington State. His parents were farmworkers, so he knows the communities CRLA serves firsthand. His work, with Spanish-speaking communities in rural areas is a unique kind of leadership. A recent case exemplifies this: A young man was being bullied and threatened in school repeatedly due to his sexual orientation. The local school district addressed his torment by placing the victim in an alternative school, which was so violent that three police raids occurred in one week, each raid uncovering weapons at school.

His mother, a monolingual Spanish speaker was desperate to help her son, but she insisted that he was not gay. She turned to Dan to help advocate with the school system. Dan worked with her and the school district to find a safe place for her son to attend school. Thanks to Dan’s representation, the student also began to receive counseling and tutoring to address his educational challenges. This alone is a great outcome, but the personal element of the story also illustrates the power of this work. The boy’s mother expressed her deep gratitude to Dan.

While she had grown to accept her son’s sexual orientation, she had tremendous worry about her son’s future, and his ability to be successful in light of the homophobia her son had already experienced. Dan shared his own personal story with the mother, as an out gay man, a professional with a happy and stable life. The mother’s response was very poignant: “You can be a lawyer and be gay?” She was amazed and happy that her son could go on to be a professional. Dan’s work combines legal advocacy with family acceptance.

This is just one example of how Dan’s work as an attorney and his passion for social justice permeates his whole life. He is an out and proud gay man, who works tireless on behalf of some of the most marginalized people in our society.

Due to these reason, and others too countless to mention, I unreservedly recommend Dan for The Best LGBT Lawyers Under, 40 class of 2013.

Sincerely,



José R. Padilla

Executive Director

California Rural Legal Assistance