

Best LGBT Lawyers Under 40: Class of 2013

Statement of Support of Nominee: Daniel Torres

Dear Nominations Committee:

I am delighted to be able to nominate Dan Torres as one of the Best LGBT Lawyers under 40: Class of 2013. I am the Family Law Director and Supervising Attorney at the National Center for Lesbian Rights, and I have had the privilege of working closely with Dan on a joint partnership focused on low-income LGBT people in rural California for the last 3 years. Dan is a visionary, passionate, and dedicated advocate for low-income LGBT farmworkers who brings everything he has to his work on behalf of LGBT people who live in rural areas, and who are immigrants and migrant workers. He has also inspired countless law students as a clinical and adjunct professor at UC Davis and Stanford Law Schools.

Dan Torres has made such a tremendous contribution to both the legal field and LGBT equality for over ten years that it is extremely challenging to describe even his most important contributions in such a short statement. Since 2010, Dan has run a groundbreaking project at California Rural Legal Assistance serving the legal needs of low-income LGBT people in rural California, with a focus on LGBT migrant farmworkers. This project, called *Projecto Poderoso*/Project Powerful, is run in partnership with the National Center for Lesbian Rights. We believe this is the only project focused on the legal needs of LGBT migrant farmworkers in the country, and Dan is often sought out as an expert on the needs of LGBT migrant farmworkers.

Dan has been a visionary in creating respectful legal aid services for rural LGBT farmworkers. He successfully worked to change the intake process for all of California Rural Legal Assistance's 21 offices to include questions for every prospective client about sexual orientation and gender identity, and trained all CRLA staff on doing intake and handling cases on behalf of LGBT clients. Dan and I also created a training of trainers program that helps legal aid advocates provide trainings to their own organizations, allowing us to reach many hundreds of advocates. This project has been piloted in California and Georgia, and has inspired numerous organizations to start LGBT committees and projects focused on improving services to low-income LGBT clients in both urban and rural areas.

Dan has organized numerous rural conferences focused on LGBT youth, LGBT elders, and LGBT people living in low-income housing, bringing together advocates and community members in extremely rural parts of California to empower community members to change their own communities. Just last month, he organized a conference about LGBT youth in El Centro, a rural community on the southeastern border of California. Many participants said that it was the first time anyone had come to talk them about the needs of LGBT youth.

Dan also is a tremendous client-centered advocate, not only giving his clients the best possible legal representation, but also being an incredibly respectful and supportive advocate. He has clients who have never heard affirming language about their sexual orientation or gender identity before meeting Dan, who have been sexually and physically assaulted on the job just because they are LGBT, and who have been who have been fired or turned away from help by the police because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Dan brings his heart and soul to every case and draws on his own personal history of growing up gay in a migrant farmworker family to understand the experiences of his clients. Through his work, Dan has begun to change the culture of farmworker employment in California, sending a message to employers that the laws against harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity apply equally to farmworkers. He successfully negotiated a groundbreaking settlement against Monterey Gourmet Foods, a large agricultural employer, whose workers endured shocking anti-gay harassment as well as sexual harassment and assault.

His career as an advocate for immigrant rights has made him a respected expert in immigration law, and he continues to travel to countries in South and Central America as a part of delegations addressing the human rights of LGBT people internationally. He is a leader in pushing for undocumented LGBT victims of hate crimes to receive U visas to remain in the U.S., and he advocates with legal aid organizations across the country to provide U visa services to LGBT victims of hate crimes.

It is hard to imagine a more deserving recipient of this award. Dan works tirelessly to serve LGBT farmworkers and shine a light on their strength as well as their need for services. Every time I meet someone who has worked with Dan, they tell me about how much his quiet passion and compassion has inspired them. Thank you for your consideration of this nomination.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cathy Sakimura', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Cathy Sakimura
Family Law Director & Supervising Attorney
National Center for Lesbian Rights