



## Deborah Niedermeyer & Manuel F. Rios III Receive Award of Merit

*Presented in honor of their pro bono work to combat fraud in immigration legal services*

SEATTLE, WA [Sept. 23, 2015] — The Washington State Bar Association (WSBA) presented Seattle attorneys **Deborah Niedermeyer** and **Manuel F. Rios III** with its 2015 Award of Merit. The award is in recognition of their work in filing the first-ever lawsuit against unlicensed immigration consultants under Washington’s 2011 Immigration Services Fraud Prevention Act. WSBA President **Anthony Gipe** presented the award at the WSBA Annual Awards Dinner on Sept. 17, 2015, at the Sheraton Seattle.

“The immigrant community is particularly vulnerable in our society,” said **Carin Weinrich**, chair of the Washington State Chapter of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (WA-AILA). “Their voices are often left unheard and their lack of knowledge is sometimes taken advantage of. Immigration lawyers can be the first line of defense for these vulnerable individuals. Manny and Deborah have demonstrated to us how we can make a difference with our legal expertise and our belief in justice and social services.”

Unlicensed immigration law practitioners, also known as “notarios,” “travel agents,” and “immigration consultants,” prey on unsophisticated immigrants with limited knowledge of English and the U.S. legal system. The processing of immigration cases by these unlicensed practitioners of law violates both criminal and civil laws in the state of Washington. Due to errors and false statements by these unlicensed practitioners, their victims are often left exposed to serious adverse legal consequences, including detention, deportation, and/or permanent separation from family in the United States. Moreover, because unlicensed immigration law practitioners frequently claim or imply that they are attorneys, their operations undermine the reputation of and the public’s confidence in the legal profession, especially within vulnerable immigrant communities.

In 2014, Niedermeyer and Rios filed a consumer protection suit on behalf of a family which had been defrauded and seriously injured by a pair of notarios. After over 80 hours of pro bono representation, Niedermeyer and Rios reached a settlement with the defendants, who agreed to pay in full what the law anticipates: triple damages to the plaintiffs, plus costs and attorneys’ fees. Niedermeyer and Rios have donated 100percent of their attorney fees to WA-AILA to set up a revolving fund to finance service of process and filing fees for future cases, to help promote the use of a “private attorney general” strategy to protect vulnerable immigration clients, and to educate immigration lawyers on how to successfully file similar consumer protection actions.

Niedermeyer is a contract attorney specializing in immigration, consumer protection, civil rights and Indian law. Her pro bono work includes nonprofit corporate governance advice and autism-related civil rights issues. She is the chair of the WA-AILA Professional Responsibility and Consumer Protection Committee.

Rios, a partner at the firm of Rios & Cruz, P.S. in Seattle, has practiced immigration law since 1997 and has been a consultant attorney for the Mexican Consulate in Washington for immigration matters since 2002. In 2009, Rios received the Latino Bar Association of Washington’s *Miembro Excepcional Award* for his pro bono work against notarios in the Latino community, and in 2013 he was awarded the *Premio Othli* by the Mexican government for his work on behalf of Mexican immigrants in the United States.

### About the Washington State Bar Association

The WSBA is part of the judicial branch and is authorized by the Washington Supreme Court to license the state’s 36,089 lawyers and over 1,000 other legal professionals. In furtherance of its obligation to protect and serve the public, the WSBA both regulates lawyers and other legal professionals under the authority of the Court and serves its members as a professional association — all without public funding. The WSBA’s mission is to serve the public and the members of the Bar, ensure the integrity of the legal profession, and to champion justice.

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