

Welcome Salvador Mungia, new Access to Justice Board member

By Jessica DiPietro, Temporary Administrative Assistant and Justice Project Coordinator,
Washington State Bar Association

Sal, past president of both the Washington State Bar and Tacoma-Pierce County Bar Associations, is currently a partner at the Tacoma office of Gordon Thomas Honeywell. With multiple statewide and national recognitions, Sal remains grounded in his familial roots. The son of immigrants from Japan and Mexico, he is dedicated to protecting the most vulnerable in our population, noting, "Ever since I became a lawyer in private practice, I spent my time giving a voice to those who do not have a voice." Sal has assisted the Pierce County Volunteer Legal Services program in reaching out to private and government practitioners to either sponsor their own clinic or send their attorneys to one of the clinics operated by Pierce County VLS. The Pierce County Department of Assigned Council now holds monthly clinics with ten of their attorneys, giving a voice to those who would otherwise not have one. The ATJ Board seems like a natural next step for Sal, as a change agent in the legal community.



Q. Jessica: What interests you about the mission of the ATJ board?

A. Sal: The mission is to achieve equal access to the law by helping people overcome economic and other barriers. I have been involved with access to justice since 1992 when I joined the Legal Aid for Washington (LAW Fund) Board. I have been actively involved with the access to justice community since that time. Access to the justice system is a core value of the ATJ Board and one of my core values as well.

Q. Jessica: What are you looking forward to during your time on the board?

A. Sal: As in anything I do, the main goal is making a difference. I am looking forward to making a difference in how people can gain access to the legal system. While uncertain about the specifics, I am confident that the ATJ Board will provide these opportunities. I am excited about moving the ball forward!

Q. Jessica: What in your background led you to the board?

A. Sal: It goes back to why I became a lawyer. I am the son of immigrants from Mexico and Japan who had little money and whose command of the English language was less than perfect. I will never forget the look of anger and hurt on my mother's face when she knew she was being taken advantage of. I was only in the second grade but I vowed I would become a lawyer so that no one would take advantage of me or my family. After becoming a lawyer I realized that I could help others as well from suffering that same fate. As soon as I started in private practice I began doing pro bono work as an ACLU-WA cooperating attorney, and have been doing pro bono work in association with numerous civil legal aid providers ever since.

Part of my pro bono work is volunteering at the neighborhood legal clinic sponsored by the Pierce County VLS program. The need is overwhelming in Pierce County. The VLS program is actively recruiting attorneys to help meet this need. I've been fortunate in opening some doors for the Pierce County VLS program in the local legal community. The response has been uniformly positive, with people always willing to listen and almost always willing to donate their time. One example is that the Department of

Assigned Counsel now holds their own in-house clinic helping people with landlord tenant law. This model of going out to practitioners and informing them of how they can change people's lives is one that can be used throughout the state.

Q. Jessica: What is a memorable accomplishment in your justice work history?

A. Sal: In the early 90's PSLAF, predecessor to Columbia Legal Services and the Northwest Justice Project, contacted me about a landlord who was literally stealing deposits placed by prospective tenants. The landlord would advertise a house for rent, take deposits from multiple applicants of \$700 to \$800, rent to one applicant, and then simply keep the deposits from the others. When asked to return the deposits he simply refused. These people had no voice. There was no one who would help them. My partner, Dianne Conway, and I represented two sets of plaintiffs against the landlord. The dispute went to trial where we obtained a judgment of approximately \$100,000 against the landlord that included a permanent injunction. The landlord filed for bankruptcy and ultimately lost the eight to ten rental properties that he had used to steal from people over a long period of time. Best case I ever had.

Trying to reach an ATJ Board member? Find the current roster and their contact details at <http://www.wsba.org/Legal-Community/Committees-Boards-and-Other-Groups/Access-to-Justice-Board/ATJ-Board-Members>