



# ANNUAL *December 2012* NEWSLETTER

*Funding public interest legal work since 1976*

## New BLF Fellow Sebastian Sanchez Begins Work at Make the Road New York

The Berkeley Law Foundation's most recent grantee, Sebastian Sanchez, has recently begun his project at Make the Road New York (MRNY).

MRNY is a unique community-based organization in New York City that empowers Latino and working class communities, through organizing, policy innovation, education, and direct services. Sebastian joins the legal team at MRNY to help pilot a new initiative to provide legal advocacy, community education, and policy support to car wash workers in New York, a population that suffers rampant wage theft and abuse.

Sebastian will work closely with organizers to reach out to workers, identify wage theft, and develop strategies and responses. The campaign will provide direct services to car wash workers in matters of wage theft, workers' compensa-

tion or other legal issues that may arise in relation to their employment.

While working to recover unpaid wages through negotiation and litigation, the project will also pursue other methods to promote a substantial and sustainable impact that improves the car wash industry as a whole. Sebastian will help to develop know-your-rights seminars for workers and draft legislation to improve regulation of the industry. Sebastian will also work with local community groups and unions, like New York Communities for Change and the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union, to develop broad structural support for the workers in this community. Launching this industry-focused project represents a new strategy for MRNY, and will be made possible with Sebastian as a dedicated fellow to help develop and run this pilot project.

In fact, in September, the first group of car wash workers in New York voted overwhelmingly to join the retail workers union. With the help of MRNY, more than a dozen employees at the carwash had previously filed a lawsuit alleging that their employer had violated state and federal labor laws, including by paying employees less than the minimum wage and not paying overtime. A similar campaign in Los Angeles has successfully resulted in collective bargaining agreements at several car wash companies.

BLF is proud to be able to fund Sebastian's work and congratulates him on his selection as a BLF grantee!

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or on Facebook!



## About Sebastian

Sebastian Sanchez is a 2012 graduate of the Seton Hall Law School, where he was a Center for Social Justice Scholar for the Urban Revitalization Project. Sebastian has worked as an immigration paralegal with the New York Legal Assistance Group in New York, served as an interpreter for community groups like Domestic Workers United and the NYC Coalition for Educational Justice, and helped to develop an emergency hot-line for immigrants facing immigration raids in New Jersey. During law school, Sebastian worked at Make the Road New York, to which he now returns as a BLF grantee.

Sebastian came to the United States from Colombia as a young child. He grew up watching his parents and relatives work in a variety of low-wage jobs, including domestic work and the car wash industry, which has helped fuel his passion for workers' rights.

## Donate to the Berkeley Law Foundation

Remember: your donations are the sole source of funding for the social justice legal work BLF sponsors. BLF does not receive outside grants or other sponsorship to fund the year-long public interest grants, only the money that is donated by individual BLF members and supporters. Please continue to support BLF as we celebrate our many years of grant giving! You can donate online to BLF at <http://www.berkeleylawfoundation.org/support-blf/>.

## Auction Raises \$33,000 for Phoenix Fellowship

BLF's student board held a successful charity auction in November, raising more than \$33,000 for the Phoenix Fellowship.

The Phoenix Fellowship is one of BLF's three funding areas, and it provides scholarship money to students of color attending Boalt who are committed to pursuing social justice legal work. The Phoenix Fellowship was created in response to California's Proposition 209, which banned the use of affirmative action in California state-sponsored higher education and had a devastating impact on the number of students of color attending Boalt.

In addition to the Phoenix Fellowship, BLF continues to provide funding for Berkeley Law students to pursue public interest work during their summers and, of course, to sponsor year-long public interest grants for recent law school graduates.

## Recent Grantees Join BLF Board

BLF also welcomes to the Board of Directors two recent year-long grantees, Veena Dubal and Daniel Redman.

Veena received her JD from Boalt in 2006 and was a 2008-09 BLF grantee at the Asian Law Caucus. She continued her work as a staff attorney there until 2012, when she returned to Boalt to complete her Ph.D. in Jurisprudence and Social Policy.

Daniel graduated from Boalt in 2008 and was jointly funded by BLF and the Pride Law Fund in 2010-11 for his work at the Del Martin Memorial LGBT Elder Advocacy Initiative at the National Center for Lesbian Rights. He is currently an associate at DLKLawGroup, PC, where he continues to focus on elder law. Daniel was also recently appointed to the San Francisco LGBT Aging Policy Task Force.

## 2011-12 Grantee Lydia Edwards Continues Domestic Workers Clinic With New Funding

BLF 2011-12 grantee Lydia Edwards reports that her Domestic Workers Legal Clinic project was a huge success and that she has secured additional funding to continue its important work.

Thanks to Lydia's help, the project helped recover \$60,000 in unpaid wages for domestic worker clients. The project has effectively used legal representation to involve domestic workers in broader organizing efforts and public campaigns, and in turn has used public pressure and organizing to force employers to agree to workers' demands. In one instance, as a result of a public campaign conducted with other workers' rights organizations, the project successfully convinced an employer to pay \$30,000 to several house cleaners owed back wages. The project also continues to pursue legislative reform in Massachusetts to create a domestic workers' bill of rights, as has been passed in New York.

Additionally, the project has developed a popular manual for domestic workers and their employers regarding the legal rights of domestic workers. The manual is available in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, and the project even hopes to be selling the manual on Amazon.com soon.

If that were not enough, the project has created an innovative mediation program, training both workers and employers to mediate disputes between domestic workers and their employers. By offering mediation as a tool for domestic workers, it allows them to try to resolve employment disputes without resorting to litigation, and this is particularly important for workers who may be afraid or unwilling to go to court or a government agency for recourse, for instance, because they are undocumented. Many of the newly trained mediators have remarked about how life-changing the experience has been, and a local union has also taken an interest in sponsoring mediation trainings for its members.

Finally, given the success of her project, it is not surprising that Lydia has been able to secure additional funding to continue her great work. She has received a \$50,000 grant to continue and expand the project's mediation work and has also received a significant grant from the Boston Bar Foundation. Lydia herself has been honored by receiving an Award of Distinction from the Berger-Marks Foundation as a young woman leading the fight for social justice.

With the additional funding the project has secured, Lydia will continue on as the Director of Legal Services and head of the Domestic Worker Law and Policy Clinic at the Brazilian Immigrant Center, where the project has been housed. The Brazilian Immigrant Center itself will be growing, opening a new Connecticut office, in addition to its current Boston office, and many aspects of Lydia's project will be replicated in the newly opened office.



*Brazilian Immigrant Center members at the National Domestic Worker Congress in Washington, D.C.*