

## Second Department's First-Ever All-Latino Panel Takes Up Arguments

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From left, Justice Lourdes M. Ventura, Justice Betsy Barros, Presiding Justice Hector D. LaSalle, and Justice Helen Voutsinas pose for a photograph before hearing oral arguments at the Appellate Division, Second Judicial Department in Brooklyn on Tuesday, September 5, 2023. Photo courtesy of OCA/David Handschuh

The Appellate Division, Second Department held historic oral arguments on Tuesday, with litigators appearing before the panel's first-ever all-Latino bench.

The session began with a statement from Presiding Justice Hector LaSalle acknowledging the accomplishments of his colleagues before calling for true change.

"We are the children of the working class and working poor," LaSalle said of himself and Justices Betsy Barros, Helen Voutsinas and Lourdes Ventura. "We are all first-

generation college graduates."

Barros is of Chilean descent, while Voutsinas and Ventura are of Dominican descent, noted LaSalle, whose family hails from Puerto Rico.

Also in attendance Tuesday were Chief Administrative Judge Joseph Zayas, former Brooklyn Supreme Court Administrative Judge and Second Department Associate Justice Ariel Belen, and former Second Department Associate Justice Reinaldo Rivera.

LaSalle called Rivera—who was appointed to the bench in 2002 and retired in July—"A person who broke down a door so the six of us could walk through it."

While LaSalle thanked all those in attendance for bearing witness to the historic occasion, he said there was still work to be done.

“It must be noted that Latinos remain underrepresented,” LaSalle said. “Latinos make up 20 percent of the state population, yet only 10 percent of the judiciary.”

With Latino Diversity Month approaching, LaSalle said he hoped empty gestures on social media would bring change.

“I for one am hopeful that the actions of these leaders will meet their soaring rhetoric,” the judge remarked.

In closing, LaSalle quoted National Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman’s poem “The Hill We Climb.”

“We will not march back to what was, but move to what shall be,” LaSalle said.

The Appellate Division, First Department held its first-ever oral arguments before an all-Latino bench in December 2021.