



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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The Minnesota/Dakotas Chapter of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) is pleased to announce that it has selected **Irma Márquez Trapero** and **Juventino Meza Rodriguez** to receive its 2013 Immigrant of Distinction Award. The award will be at a Community Forum focused on Immigration Reform scheduled at the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs of the University of Minnesota at noon on Thursday, March 14, 2013. The event, co-hosted by the Immigration History Research Center and The Humphrey School of Public Affairs, will include a forum discussing current developments in immigration reform efforts and be followed by a reception.

This year the Immigrant of Distinction Award recognizes the younger generation of immigrants who have made substantial contributions to their communities or professions through exceptional leadership, high achievement, or moral courage, often doing so while struggling under the burden of no lawful immigration status, having been brought to the United States as children.

Irma Márquez Trapero came to St. James, Minnesota from Sinaloa, Mexico with her family when she was 9 years old. She graduated with honors from St. James High School in 2008 and just last year graduated from Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota with a degree in political science and gender, women, and sexualities studies.

Like many young people in her situation Ms. Márquez faced many obstacles, but, uniquely, she has emerged as a leader, seeking to bridge the gap for the undocumented while strengthening her community. In high school, while excelling academically, she also participated in the University of Minnesota extension's Horizons Program, developed to guide small communities like St. James to develop and strengthen local leadership and re-energize the struggling economic community, acting as a liaison for the Latino community. She also co-founded the St. James Youth council to empower students in the community.

Despite her undocumented status she matriculated at Gustavus Adolphus, where she attained a Phillips Scholarship, which identifies and supports future leaders dedicated to community service, which Ms. Márquez used to design and implement a summer program for middle school students that encouraged them to interact more positively with differences in their community. Her efforts focused on her college's community as well, as she was president of the college's Diversity Leadership Council and Co-President of its Pan-African Student Organization, as well as organizing a Building Bridges Diversity Conference. She also was a representative of Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, researching and offering alternatives to improve the success of minority students in Minnesota schools.

All of this Ms. Márquez achieved without immigration status – a story she related powerfully alongside undocumented activist Jose Antonio Vargas recently at a fundraiser for the Immigrant

Law Center of Minnesota. in her own words, “When you are undocumented, you have to find an alternate story for yourself.” However, thanks to Department of Homeland Security’s recent program, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Ms. Márquez was able to obtain permission to remain, as the Congress seeks to normalize the status of hundreds of thousands of individuals like her.

Juventino Meza Rodriguez arrived to St. Paul from Jalisco, Mexico when he was 15. He graduated from Arlington High School in St. Paul and graduated with honors from Augsburg College in 2011 after matriculating there with a Presidential Scholarship.

Like Ms. Márquez, Mr. Meza has emerged from his circumstances to work for equal opportunity for the disadvantaged. He is a tireless, natural leader for immigrant equality. While at Augsburg he founded two student organizations, one serving undocumented students and the other promoting comprehensive immigration reform and a DREAM Act, and he also was Student Body President.

He is a founding member and former Executive Director of NAVIGATE, an immigrant youth-led organization seeking to widen the path to higher education for all immigrant students regardless of status in Minnesota. What began as a summer project has grown into a sustained, vibrant organization with a budget of over \$80,000. The organization has provided scholarships and jobs for immigrant children, and, more importantly, has educated and effected policy change on behalf of immigrants.

Mr. Meza has been an example of effective activism through is efforts to obtain passage of Minnesota’s flat-rate tuition bill, which came about following veto of the Minnesota Dream Act, which would grant access to education to thousands of undocumented Minnesotans. He currently works at the Citizens League, where he brings Latinos into the conversation about such important Minnesota policy issues as Tax Reform, Budget Reform, and Health Care Reform.

He is an active lobbyist and is key leader in Minnesota organizing support for Comprehensive Immigration Reform.

To members of the press:

For more information about the Immigrant of Distinction award, past awardees, how to attend this year’s ceremony, or AILA, contact Marc Prokosch, Chair, American Immigration Lawyers Association, MN/Dakotas Chapter, at (952) 854-3313 or marc@karamlaw.com.

AILA is the national association of over 11,000 attorneys and law professors who practice and teach immigration law. Founded in 1946, AILA is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that provides continuing legal education, information, professional services, and expertise through its 36 chapters and over 50 national committees. The Minnesota/Dakotas Chapter comprises approximately 275 Members who represent U.S. families seeking permanent residence for close family members, as well as U.S. businesses seeking talent from the global marketplace. Our Members also represent foreign students, entertainers, athletes, and asylum seekers, often on a pro bono basis.