

Meet Mayra Salinas-Menjivar:

One of the Most Influential Immigrant Rights Attorneys in Nevada

Mayra Salinas-Menjivar was recently named one of the Top 40 Lawyers Under 40 by the Hispanic National Bar Association.

BY MARISA RODRIGUEZ (CITY OF NORTH LAS VEGAS), RYAN GORMLEY (WEINBERG, WHEELER, HUDGINS, GUNN & DIAL, LLC), AND MARY BACON (SPENCER FANE LLP)

While relatively new to the law, **Mayra Salinas-Menjivar is no stranger to having a big impact.** In fact, her achievements in the Nevada Legislature caused William S. Boyd School of Law Professor Michael Kagan, who oversees the UNLV Immigration Clinic, to remark that “she has been among the most influential attorneys in advancing immigrant rights in Nevada in the last five years.” And the Hispanic National Bar Association (HNBA) recently named Salinas-Menjivar to its 2020 list of “Top Lawyers Under 40.”

To become a lawyer, Salinas-Menjivar had to overcome the odds. She was born in El Salvador. When she was 6 years old, her mother immigrated to Las

Vegas. Six months later, she followed, and they have lived here ever since.

After graduating from Valley High School, Salinas-Menjivar attended UNLV, where she graduated with a degree in finance. She was the first person in her family to attend college in the U.S.

To pay for it, she worked three jobs. Yes, three—while a full-time student. In addition to working part time in retail sales and as a receptionist, Salinas-Menjivar worked full time at a boutique criminal defense firm for five years. There, she did everything from administrative work to assisting on cases.

This life experience instilled in Salinas-Menjivar a work ethic and empathy for others that is readily apparent in everything she does. It also opened her eyes to the possibility of becoming a lawyer and ultimately led to her attending the William S. Boyd School of Law.

At Boyd, Salinas-Menjivar engaged with the community through several organizations. Notably, she was a student-attorney at the UNLV Immigration Clinic, where she assisted clients with various immigration issues. In fact, one case persists to this day.

During her last year of law school, Salinas-Menjivar took on the representation of a mother and daughter from El Salvador in an asylum petition. She developed a special affinity for these clients as she saw her own story being replayed. Throughout the last four years, she has advocated for them in front of an immigration judge, on administrative review and before the Ninth Circuit. While the lower courts initially denied asylum, the Ninth Circuit recently vacated the denial and remanded the matter for further proceedings, which remain pending.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28

Meet Mayra Salinas-Menjivar



Mayra Salinas-Menjivar meets with U.S. Senators Jacky Rosen (right) and Catherine Cortez Masto.

Following her graduation from Boyd in 2017, Salinas-Menjivar served as the first University Legal Services Fellow with the UNLV Immigration Clinic. She developed that fellowship into a pilot program for immigration legal services. The program aids college students and their families in navigating the immigration process. Following a successful pilot year, she helped expand the program to the College of Southern Nevada.

In this role, Salinas-Menjivar transitioned her focus from advocating for a few to advancing change for many. During her fellowship, college students advocating for immigrant rights alerted her to a recurring problem – immigrant residents could not perform work they were qualified to do because Nevada’s occupational licensing laws precluded them from obtaining occupational licenses. She knew that California and New York had recently passed legislation to combat this issue. So, she set out to fix it in Nevada.

Salinas-Menjivar teamed up with Assemblywoman Selena Torres to enact a statutory amendment that would allow immigrant residents to obtain occupational

licenses. The legislature enacted the bill in 2018. Now, she actively consults on efforts to enact similar legislation in other states.

Although the amendment to the occupational licensing statute was Salinas-Menjivar’s first encounter with the legislative process, it was not the last. That same session, she worked on more than 15 bills advancing the interests of the marginalized with the Nevada Immigrant Coalition, passing many of them into law.

“I will certainly be back in front of the legislature in the future,” Salinas-Menjivar said. “I did not know how powerful local policy could be until I got involved in the legislative session. Now, there is no doubt in my mind that state legislatures are where systemic change is born because that is where people show up to demand changes that directly impact their communities.”

Currently, Salinas-Menjivar is a busy litigator at Holley Driggs with a broad practice focused on business litigation. Yet, it has not slowed down her community efforts. She serves as president of the Las Vegas Latino Bar Association



Bliss Requa-Trautz (left), Martha Menendez, Arlene Alvarez, Mayra Salinas-Menjivar, Janine Kacprzak and Enedina Dorsey held a house party to discuss proposed immigration policies and their impact on the Nevada immigrant community.

(LBA), deputy president for Region XIV of the HNBA and a member of various bar associations. She is also the Nevada Hispanic Legislative Caucus COVID-19 Task Force’s Immigration Subcommittee Chair. In her role with the LBA, she mentors younger students and, this year alone, has organized and hosted several webinars to inform the community on elections and how to obtain assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In her free time, Salinas-Menjivar enjoys watching cooking/travel shows and riding her road bike. She recently purchased a Peloton. Now, she will be able to enjoy both cycling and cooking/travel shows at the same time.