



Erica González discusses issues affecting New York’s Latino community at DJJ’s 2008 Hispanic Heritage Roundtable.

El Diario/la Prensa’s Erica González Keynotes at DJJ’s Second Roundtable Commemorating Hispanic Heritage Month

On Thursday, September 18, 2008 the Department of Juvenile Justice hosted a breakfast roundtable at its William Street headquarters in commemoration of Hispanic Heritage Month. The forum’s special guest was Erica González, opinion page editor for *El Diario/La Prensa*.

As the opinion page editor, Erica develops and writes the paper’s editorial position on local and national issues. She edits weekly columns, recruits guest writers, and initiates editorial board meetings with candidates for elected office and an array of organizations and leaders. Gonzalez received an award from the National Association of Hispanic Publications for authoring an editorial on fear mongering around former New York Governor Eliot Spitzer’s driver’s license initiative. She regularly represents *El Diario/La Prensa* on media panels and has appeared on Good Day Street Talk and Air America’s Grit TV.

Ms. González opened the discussion with a review of her newspaper’s 95-year history in service to the Latino community. She spoke about critical issues today such as immigration, education, and the marginalization of certain sectors of the Latino community, such as undocumented persons. She reminded the participants of the struggles that the Latino community has gone through, sometimes enlisting the help of more established Civil-Rights groups. Ms. Gonzalez also discussed the language needs of the Latino community even as it was noted that DJJ is implementing Mayor Executive Order 120 that requires translation and interpretation services for the families it serves.

The forum was well attended by DJJ employees representing a broad spectrum of cultural origins, many of whom are immigrants themselves or the children of immigrants. This is the second year DJJ has hosted this event. The “roundtable” setting proved very conducive to the discussion as many DJJ employees offered their insights and observations.

Case Management Supervisor for NSD, Marcia St. Juste commented that it was important that there be some movement towards removing the stigma of mental illness in the Latino community and that the press had an important role to play in this. Director of Programs Services Sonia Galarza spoke about the need for resources in the community, such as additional Community-Based Organizations (CBO’s) to serve the children being released from detention.

With parts of the discussion centered on the mental health needs of the residents in the agency’s care, it was noteworthy to report that DJJ’s Collaborative Family Initiative (CFI) had just reached a milestone on September 17, 2008. The Department’s 100th CFI resident was released to the community, marking a significant accomplishment toward helping to build a mental health service infrastructure in the communities where these children live

