

**REMARKS OF MICHAEL A. CARDOZO TO THE ANNUAL PARTNERSHIP
AWARDS BENEFIT OF
BROOKLYN LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION**

Steiner Studios, Brooklyn, Nov. 13, 2008

Tonight we celebrate the 40th anniversary of this wonderful organization. And we do so while facing the greatest economic crisis since the 1930s, a situation that makes the role of Brooklyn Legal Services A more important than ever.

We all know what a great city we live in; in fact, the greatest city in the world as Mayor Bloomberg frequently says. And, as the Mayor has emphasized, in taking the needed steps to deal with today's economic crisis the City's actions must be guided by the indisputable principal that we cannot jeopardize all that makes this City so special.

The diversity of the people who make up this city is one of the major factors contributing to making this city great. In fact, the recent presidential election hopefully demonstrates that this country is beginning to recognize that our diversity is one of our strengths. But today's economic problems pose grave challenges to one group that make up the diversity of our country, and our city, the poor.

A city that does not take steps in times of crisis to provide for people at the bottom of the economic ladder does not deserve to be called the greatest city in the world. But we cannot expect government to do it alone. Ladies and gentlemen, New York City and Mayor Bloomberg need your help.

Without groups like Brooklyn Legal Services A the most vulnerable in our society are at substantial risk. They may not have adequate housing, they could face eviction, or

discrimination or deportation, they may be powerless in the face of domestic violence or they may be denied access to vital health care. The inevitable result would not only be terrible human suffering, but the decline of a great city that must – as a matter of economic self interest as well as basic human decency --provide for the poor.

It is simply not practical to leave this problem only to the government. Groups like Brooklyn A must work with government to devise ways to be sure that those who are most at risk in our society will be protected.

I am a great believer in the need for legal services for the poor and that much of those services should be funded by the government. In fact, I strongly believe, as I have frequently stated, that government funding for legal services is grossly inadequate and should be increased.

But, as deserving as is that need for increased government funding of legal services, particularly, I would argue, at a time like this, the stark reality is that New York City simply lacks the moneys to provide more funding for legal services, and in fact, may have to reduce it.

Of course, this means that the need for private economic support of legal services organizations is greater than ever.

There are truly hundreds if not thousands of important community and legal services groups in this City. One such organization is certainly El Puente, whose founder and President, Luis Acosta, you justly honor tonight. On the legal front the organizations helping the poor range from the Legal Aid Society, to the over 44 bar associations in

New York City, to neighborhood law offices. No individual lawyer better represents the bar associations' vital role in providing legal services to the poor than your honoree Betsy Plevan, former president of two different bar associations and leader in many others. And certainly Brooklyn A, is an outstanding example of a neighborhood law office that provides invaluable legal help to the people in North and East Brooklyn who face individual legal problems of enormous consequence to the affected client.

But Brooklyn A does more, and here it offers an important example to the rest of the New York bar. Specifically, it recognizes that the role of a lawyer helping those less fortunate extends far beyond the important job he or she plays in representing the poor in an individual litigation or related matter. Rather, Brooklyn A realizes that the job of attorneys for the poor extends to – and indeed can be particularly effective in – helping community and economic development initiatives aimed at helping those less fortunate. This includes counseling community organizations as they put together affording housing projects, advising on the creation and development of community health centers, to day to day advice to community based organizations devoted to helping the poor.

Too often, when one mentions the need for attorneys to perform pro bono work, lawyers who are not litigation specialists respond by saying, I can't help, I am not a litigator. FALSE as the critically important work of the community and economic development section of this organization demonstrates.

Let me add that the work of the community organizations, and the lawyers who counsel them, can not advance far without support from the business community, which must recognize the vital role it plays in helping the community. A terrific example of this is

the Dime Community Bank whose CEO, Vince Palaglano **Pal-ag-Iano**, you honor tonight.

This country, this State and this City face daunting economic challenges. Government cannot realistically face those challenges without help from everyone, especially groups like Brooklyn Legal Services A. To those of you here tonight who have contributed generously to supporting this organization I want to say thank you on behalf of a grateful city and a grateful Mayor. And to Brooklyn A, and its devoted staff, let me say thank you as well.