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Roger Williams University School of Law

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Newsroom

Elorza on Housing Court Appointment

From the April 5, 2010, edition of [Rhode Island Lawyers Weekly](#):



Last month, Providence Mayor David N. Cicilline named Roger Williams University School of Law Professor Jorge O. Elorza to a Housing Court judgeship. In announcing the selection, which must be confirmed by the City Council, Cicilline praised Elorza's "deep commitment to helping low-income families navigate the legal system."

Elorza joined the faculty of RWU law school in 2005 and is founder and co-director of the Latino Policy Institute at the university. Prior to becoming a professor, Elorza was a staff attorney at Rhode Island Legal Services where he handled matters involving private and public housing. He has also worked as a forensic auditor. He recently spoke with Lawyers Weekly reporter Noah Schaffer about his pending judgeship.

Q. Had you sought out this appointment?

A. No. The mayor gave me a call, and he offered to nominate me. I said I'd be proud to serve. I teach a housing law and policy course, and I have a background in housing, having written and practiced in the area, so I think I have a good perspective to add.

Q. Did you ever practice in front of the Providence Housing Court?

A. I never appeared before that court. I did litigate cases in state District Court and Superior Court, and I second-chaired housing cases before the [R.I.] Supreme Court and in federal District Court.

Q. What will your work on the court entail?

A. The primary goal is to ensure that homeowners maintain their properties and comply with housing codes and ordinances. It deals with municipal ordinances and state laws, as well.

Q. Is the court's work challenged by the difficulties that many homeowners are facing in this economic climate?

A. Definitely. I know a lot of people have fallen on hard times. The purpose of the court is to work with homeowners so they can maintain their homes and do the necessary repairs. As I understand it, there is discretion that Housing Court judges have, so that if the homeowner is making a good-faith effort, you can work with them. The last thing you want is to make it unaffordable for them to make repairs and have them walk away from the home. ... But we also have to protect tenants. In my former job, I litigated literally hundreds of conditions cases where I represented tenants, so I understand that their interests need to be protected as well.

Q. You're founder of the Latino Policy Institute at Roger Williams University. What is the purpose of the institute?

A. Latinos are projected to comprise 30 percent of the entire state by 2050. Many laws and policies are being adopted without [looking at] how they will affect Latinos, so the institute hopes to provide hard data that can inform policymakers. Also, 80 percent of the Latino population is concentrated in four core communities: Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls and Woonsocket. So it makes sense to think that the rest of the state might not fully understand who, what and how Latinos are. They'll see that Latinos care about the same things that the rest of the state cares about: a strong and vibrant economy, strong schools, clean and open government. Our message that we hope to promote is what is good for Latinos is good for the state as a whole.

Source: <http://rilawyersweekly.com/blog/2010/04/01/a-quick-word-with-%E2%80%A6-j...>