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Newsroom: Fund Lawyers To Fight For The Poor 1-26-2018

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Roger Williams University School of Law

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January 26, 2018

Newsroom

Fund lawyers to fight for the poor

As an Ecuadorian refugee to the United States, Luis Mancheno '13 got his first taste of the power of law to change lives for the better. Today, he's being honored as a Champion for Justice for his own, already extraordinary contributions to his field.



Luis Mancheno '13 Image Credit: Yana Paskova/The New York Times
January 26, 2018 Luis Mancheno '13

A "My Turn" column from the [Providence Journal for Friday, Jan. 26, 2018](#):

I fled my native Ecuador after people tried to kill me because I am gay. Alone, poor and desperate, I arrived in the United States and applied to become a refugee. During those first years in this country, [the promise of the American Dream sustained me](#). I believed I could become whoever I wanted to be if I worked hard and sacrificed.

That promise was realized seven years ago when the Roger Williams University School of Law held its [Public Interest Auction](#). After finishing my first semester of law school, I knew I wanted to use my law degree to help others in need. So on that night, I reached out to people who might help me pursue public-interest law.

Nervous and eager to make a good impression, I chose an orange tie and a sharp blue suit. I ate dinner beforehand so I wouldn't be hungry during the event. I arrived five minutes before the program started. Half an hour later, [Professor David A. Logan](#), then dean of the law school, pulled me aside and gave me a huge hug, congratulating me. First-semester grades were out, and I was in the top 5 percent of my class.

I had worked very hard. I was always afraid that I was not going to match the smart people in my class. I read textbooks three to four times, with a Spanish-English dictionary next to me. I embarrassed myself trying to participate in class, confusing words like “memorialization” with “memorabilia.” Realizing that those sacrifices had finally paid off, I shed a tear.

During that event, I was offered a research assistant position with the dean. Roger Williams Law was able to raise thousands of dollars during the evening, and I was awarded some of that money to complete unpaid legal internships at [Catholic Charities](#) and the [Political Asylum and Immigration Representation Project](#) in Massachusetts. That same money let me travel to Washington, D.C., the next summer to complete an internship for the [United Nations Refugee Agency](#), helping fellow refugees.

All those law school experiences opened doors. After graduation, I had the chance to provide legal services for indigent people in Arizona and to work as a lawyer for the [Bronx Defenders](#), the nation's first public defense program for people in deportation proceedings. In January, I was one of the lawyers that [helped stop the Trump administration's initial travel ban](#), which prevented citizens from seven countries — all with heavily Muslim populations — from entering the United States.

Today, I understand that philanthropy is an indispensable ingredient in the American Dream recipe. It's true that hard work and sacrifice are required. But in my case, no amount of hard work could have carried me to where I am today if not for the people who believed in me and those who donated money to let law students dedicate their careers to serving others.

The truth is: There's no real dream if there are no opportunities to seize. And that's particularly true for people whose skin color, immigration status, poverty and personal circumstances have left them at the bottom of society.

Today, funding for legal services and for opportunities to law students committed to public-interest jobs is more important than ever. If you're wondering how to help immigrants, women, Latinos, black folks and people in the LGBT community — all of whom are under attack right now — you can do so by sharing some of your prosperity with people who are dedicated to defending them.

Your sacrifice will have huge ripple effects in the future. It will help us build our great nation. And — who knows? — it might help a refugee wearing an orange tie to become a lawyer.

Luis Mancheno, a 2013 Roger Williams University Law School graduate, is an immigration lawyer at the [Bronx Defenders](#) in New York. He is slated to receive the Alumni Public Interest Champion Award at the school's [Champions for Justice gala](#) today, in Providence.