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## **Orange County Bar Association to Honor Judge Francisco F. Firmat with Prestigious “West” Award**

NEWPORT BEACH, Calif.—The Orange County Bar Association (OCBA) will present Orange County Superior Court Judge Francisco F. Firmat with the Franklin G. West Award at the 2013 OCBA Judges’ Night and Annual Meeting on Thursday, Jan. 17, 2013, at the Irvine Marriott in Irvine.

Judge Firmat is the 43rd recipient of the Franklin G. West Award, the highest honor awarded by the OCBA. Established in 1971 in memory of the late Judge Franklin G. West, a highly respected jurist who served on the bench from January 1939 to March 1965, the West Award is bestowed upon an outstanding attorney or judge who has made significant contributions to advance and elevate justice and law. Judge West’s 26 years and two months on the bench constituted the longest term ever served by a judge in California.

Born in Cuba, Judge Firmat immigrated to the United States as a temporary orphan with no knowledge of English when his father—a jurist himself—realized that there was no hope for their family under the communist regime. According to colleagues who submitted the award nomination on his behalf, Judge Firmat’s personal background and experiences have informed his values and produced a courageous, compassionate, and extraordinary lawyer and judge. Having committed his private and public legal career to advancing the cause of justice and espoused an enduring commitment to the disenfranchised, Judge Firmat truly exemplifies each of the ideals represented by the Franklin G. West Award.

Judge Firmat began his legal career in 1976 as a sole practitioner in Fullerton, Calif., following his graduation from Western State University School of Law. He was appointed to the North Orange County Municipal Court in 1985 and elevated to the Superior Court in 1990, where he has served on both the Civil and Family Law Panels. After entering into a full-time Family Law assignment, Judge Firmat quickly rose to become the Supervising Judge of the Family Law Panel, in which capacity he used his position to foster significant institutional change to improve access to justice for litigants who are at risk of being marginalized by the justice system. His accolades are numerous, including the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers' Distinguished Jurist Award (2009); the Judicial Council of California's Aranda Access to Justice Award (2008), which is awarded to a judge who has demonstrated a long-term commitment to improving access to the courts and who has significantly improved access for low- and moderate-income Californians; the Orange County Women Lawyers Association's Judge of the Year Award (2007); the OCBA Family Law Section's J.E.T. Rutter Judge of the Year Award (2005); and the OCBA Harmon G. Scoville Award (1992), which honors a member of the Orange County legal community whose career exemplifies the highest standards of the profession and who has contributed to the Bar while championing our constitutional system of justice; among others.

Although slated to retire from full-time public service on Feb. 25, 2013, Judge Firmat leaves behind an extensive legacy of improvements to the bench and bar, including an interpreter intern program to assist family law litigants through a collaboration with California State University, Los Angeles; a non-litigation track that enabled OCBA Family Law attorneys and the Court to reduce rejected judgments by 26 percent in a single year; a self-help forum involving quarterly meetings between the Public Law Center, the Legal Aid Society of Orange County, the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, local law school clinics, and others to share information and strategies to improve access to self-help for litigants; town hall meetings designed to allow stakeholders to discuss changes in the legal system in a non-intimidating environment; mediation training at the Strauss Institute for Family Law judicial officers; expedited judgments in family law cases to benefit both children and the families'

financial welfare; and more.

Judge Firmat's innovative programs have made a difference and will undoubtedly leave a lasting legacy in the Orange County community.

**About the Orange County Bar Association**

Established in 1901, the Orange County Bar Association is one of the largest voluntary bars in California. The mission of the Orange County Bar Association is to enhance the system of justice, to support the lawyers who serve it and to assist the community served by it.

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