

Distinguished Service Award to Mónica Palacio

Craig Howell, former GLAA President
GLAA 45th Anniversary Reception
Policy Restaurant and Lounge
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Born in Bogotá, Colombia, Mónica Palacio brings to our community twenty years of experience in civil rights, strengthening communities in crisis, and coalition building for social justice. She holds a J.D. from the Georgetown University Law Center and a B.A. from Fordham University. She served as a commissioner on the D.C. Commission on Human Rights from 2004 through 2008 and later directed the District's Language Access Program for the Office of Human Rights (OHR).

Mónica was appointed as Acting Director of OHR in late 2013 by then-Mayor Vincent Gray and was formally confirmed by the Council as permanent Director a few months later. GLAA was happy to support her re-appointment by Mayor Bowser last year. Her accomplishments as OHR Director have been impressive in both scope and magnitude.

Mónica testified in October 2014 before the Council on behalf of OHR and the entire District government in support of legislation to repeal the notorious Armstrong Amendment, a toxic rider that Congress grafted onto the DC Human Rights Law in the late 1980s to allow religiously-based educational institutions to discriminate against LGBT student organizations. We all can be grateful that repeal of the Armstrong Amendment has been successfully enacted and that our landmark Human Rights Law once again stands unvexed as a model statute for the nation.

Mónica has been a vigorous enforcer of the District's Citywide Youth Bullying Prevention Program, carrying out the provisions of the law passed in 2012 to combat the scourge of bullying against LGBT and other minority students that contributes to the on-going wave of youth suicides. Under her guidance, virtually every D.C. youth-serving government agency, public school and charter school now has comprehensive anti-bullying policies and programs in place.

Of special note to our own community, last year she directed the nation's first systematic government-sponsored test of the extent of anti-transgender job bias. Regrettably if not surprisingly, OHR's study uncovered such discrimination in nearly half the surveyed D.C. employers, who preferred less-qualified cisgender job applicants over better-qualified transgender ones. Mónica has also reinvigorated OHR's Safe Bathrooms campaign, to ensure that single-occupancy restrooms are not arbitrarily (and now illegally) labeled "Men" or "Women."

At a time when a grotesque anti-transgender agenda is being aggressively pursued across much of the nation, Mónica's courageous leadership has truly, in George Washington's words, "raised a standard to which the wise and the honest may repair."

It is my honor to present Mónica Palacio with GLAA's Distinguished Service Award.