First 5 LA’s Evelyn V. Martinez to be Honored for Championing Reproductive Rights of Latinas

First 5 LA Executive Director Evelyn V. Martinez will be honored Thursday for championing reproductive rights of Latinas and families with a special Justice Award by the Los Angeles Center for Law and Justice (LACLJ) at its Annual Dinner at the Millennium Biltmore in downtown LA.

The LACLJ will also honor Gloria Molina, LA County supervisor; Antonia Hernandez, executive director of the California Community Foundation; Olivia G. Rodriguez, domestic violence program director of the Chicana Service Action Center, and Dr. Bernard L. Rosenfeld, a Houston physician.

As a first year lawyer, Hernandez represented the 11 Latinas in a 1975 landmark civil rights case, Madrigal v. Quilligan, which challenged the involuntary sterilization of Latinas at USC-LA County Medical Center in Los Angeles after Dr. Rosenfeld, then an OB-GYN resident, reported widespread sterilization abuse there.

Molina and Martinez were among the leaders of the Comision Feminil de Los Angeles, a Chicana feminist group, who rallied support from other women's and civil rights organizations for the case. Their advocacy before legislative committees helped spur new federal and state legislation to safeguard women's reproductive rights.

A children’s and civil rights advocate for more than 30 years, Martinez heads First 5 LA, an independent commission established by taxpayers through Proposition 10 in 1998 to promote, support and improve the early development of children in LA County from prenatal through 5 years of age.

Since its inception, First 5 LA has allocated more than $800 million to increase services for children, including $600 million for universal preschool, $100 million for children’s health insurance, and $15 million to support pregnant women to ensure they have healthy, full-term babies.
Martinez previously served as executive director of the Los Angeles Alliance for a Drug Free Community and as director of Project Management at the City of Los Angeles Housing Authority. At the federal level, she served as a special assistant at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and at the Department of Energy in Washington, D.C., and acted as consultant to two think tanks, SRI International and the RAND Corporation, on research projects involving licensed home child care and bilingual education.

Martinez holds a Masters of Public Administration form the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and completed undergraduate studies at Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles.

First 5 LA is a unique child-advocacy organization created by California voters to invest tobacco tax revenues in programs for improving the lives of children in Los Angeles County, from prenatal through age 5. First 5 LA champions health, education and safety causes concerning young children and families.