



# EBCLC News

October 2016

Edition





## A Message from the Executive Director

If you are reading this newsletter, you are probably someone who already knows how important it is to exercise your right to vote in this year's election. You do not need to be convinced that "your vote is your voice" or that there is much at stake, beyond who sits in the Oval Office. You already know the importance of "down ballot" candidates and propositions, and that there are many issues being decided at the local and state levels that connect to our collective values and priorities. Yet, with palpable voter apathy, disillusionment and justified cynicism, I feel compelled to weigh in to say to those who have the right to vote (who have not been excluded and disenfranchised): **PLEASE VOTE! IT MATTERS!**

At EBCLC, we provide legal services and training in a range of areas that we refer to as "the social indicators of justice:" housing, jobs and financial security, education and youth justice, immigration and health and welfare. EBCLC staff and students work to defend the rights of our clients and also to promote the community we hope to see, one that is more *just, healthy, productive, secure and hopeful* for all. While I believe all people want this for our communities, there are significant choices for how we get there. This election brings opportunities to decide between candidates with starkly different visions for the direction our country, states and cities should take, and make choices about the laws that will guide the way. This year, there are numerous California propositions and Bay Area city measures that resonate with the work we do on behalf of the clients and communities we serve.

At EBCLC, we witness daily the ways in which our clients' lives are entangled in laws that can help or harm. New tenant protection ordinances can help prevent illegal evictions in a time of epidemic displacement. New taxes on "big soda" can provide resources for health programs and schools. Reducing over-reliance on



As election season nears, it's important that our community members understand their voting and civic participation rights. Most individuals who have suffered a criminal conviction have been disenfranchised, excluded from the political process, and have received incorrect information time and time again, leading them to believe that they are barred permanently from voting.

We strongly encourage all eligible individuals to vote this year in the presidential election and for California statewide ballot measures. You are eligible to register and vote in California if you are:

1. A United States Citizen;
2. A California Resident;
3. At least 18 years of age or older on or before election day (November 8, 2016);
4. Not currently imprisoned or on parole for a felony conviction; and
5. Not currently found to be mentally incompetent by a court of law.

You are ineligible to vote if you are:

1. currently in prison\*;
2. serving a felony sentence in county jail\*; or
3. on parole\*.

*\*Your right to vote will be **automatically** restored upon release from parole or release from county jail and you should register to vote.*

The deadline to register to vote is **October 24, 2016!** You may register to vote online at: <http://registertovote.ca.gov/> or at the Department of Motor Vehicles, local library, or U.S. post office.

Check out EBCLC's Voter Eligibility Fact Sheet [here](#).

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## Staff Spotlight

Serina Rankins



**Tell us about yourself.**

I am the Paralegal and Intake Specialist for the Clean Slate Practice at EBCLC. I have been with EBCLC since July 2007 and for these nine years, I helped to shape and expand the Clean Slate Practice to what it is today. I have deep roots in the Bay Area, being born and raised in Oakland. I feel privileged to work at an organization that serves my community in so many great ways. In addition to my work here at EBCLC, I serve as a Board Member for a non-profit called Esq Apprentice and I volunteer on the School Governance Council for my daughter's school. Also, I am known for my role as "Momager" because I manage my daughter Alexandria with her acting, modeling and dancing career.

**Who has inspired you in your life and why?** **Foundation Focus**

My mother is one of my inspirations. She is known to many as Mama Rankins or Mrs. Rankins because she is a mom or friend to everyone she meets (literally everyone). She has taught me a great amount of humility. It is from her example that I treat everyone that I meet with compassion and kindness.

**One of my favorite places in the Bay Area is...**

I enjoy going to First Fridays in Oakland. This is where I can meet up with friends

# fi redoll

## FOUNDATION

Since 2006, EBCLC has received consistent financial support from the Firedoll Foundation, based in Walnut Creek, CA, whose motto is "Helping nonprofits fight the good fight." True to their word, over the past five years, Firedoll has focused their funding on our Immigration Program's Detention & Deportation Defense Project, which has provided crucial legal services to more than 250 low-income immigrants who were detained at the West County Detention Facility in Richmond and/or were facing removal proceedings. These cases are often very time- and resource-intensive, and Firedoll's Program Officer, Arlene Wong, and Senior Program Officer, Neil Sims, have been spirited and enthusiastic champions for this difficult-to-fund project. EBCLC greatly appreciates the impact the foundation has made on the lives of some of our most vulnerable clients.

### Client Corner

#### Rodrigo Corona Flores



The first time Rodrigo Corona Flores attempted to enter the United States, he was stopped.

"I was 10 years old and riding in a car to the border with a coyote," Flores said. "We tried to get through with false papers, but I was sent back."

Flores' mother had recently passed away. His father had left Flores and his two older brothers years ago. Without a guardian, Mexican authorities placed Flores in foster care.

"I was there for two weeks before my grandfather said he would take me. He was in his 70s and I knew he couldn't financially support me, but he got me out," Flores said.

Shortly after his release, Flores returned to the border. This time, he passed. He joined his brothers in Richmond and relied on a family network for support.

"I lived with cousins, uncles and my brothers," Flores said.

The transition from Guadalajara was tremendously difficult. He spoke no English when he arrived and had little help with school. There were more immediate lessons to learn in survival.

"Early on I learned to run if I ever saw a white car or van with 'ICE' on it," Flores said. "It was constant fear. I couldn't do a lot of the things people do in high school. I couldn't live a normal childhood."

Flores says there was a time he hung with the wrong crowd. Deeply religious, he says he blamed God for putting him through such difficult situations while so young. He hurt, and it made him angry.

During his junior year of high school, he changed his perspective.

"I got tired of thinking about how I was going to make it another day," Flores said.

Neither of his brothers graduated high school, but Flores planned to do that and more. It wouldn't be easy. While seeking advice on applying for grants and scholarships for college, he learned the importance of a social security number. Without one, he was told, admission into college, and funding it, would be difficult.

Despite the hurdles, Flores earned admission into UC Berkeley.

Once on campus, he found help at UC Berkeley's Educational Opportunity Program. The EOP directed Flores to the East Bay Community Law Center, which--through its partnership with Berkeley's Undocumented Students Program--helped him navigate the labyrinthine nature of federal student aid.

More recently, the law center earned Flores a green card and special immigrant juvenile status. According to Staff Attorney Prerna Lal, this was possible due to a recent change in California law, which extended probate court jurisdiction to all minors under 21 years of age.

In December 2015, with green card in hand, Flores returned to Mexico for the first time.

"The law center paid for the paperwork and helped me with the forms," Flores said. "It was great to reconnect to my home country and see family I hadn't seen in so long. I placed flowers on my mother's grave and prayed to her. I thought about all the crazy hardships I've faced and the opportunity I have now to study at a school and have a future I couldn't have in Mexico."

A senior, Flores is majoring in Social Welfare. He dreams of creating a nonprofit to prepare minorities for college.

"I'm passionate about community organizing," Flores said. "I want to be someone people look up to."

## Client Corner

### Erika Villasenor



Shortly after she was born in Jalisco, Mexico, Erika Villasenor's parents brought her across the border to find opportunity in California's agricultural community, just outside of Bakersfield.

Growing up, her parents never sat her down to explain the family's legal status. It was an implied thing, she said, learning how to live in the shadows.

"I knew my parents were not documented, so I figured I wasn't by extension," Villasenor said. "But I didn't let it define my possibilities."

Now a second-year law student at UC Berkeley School of Law, Villasenor wants to provide resources to people like herself in the Central Valley.

"There's an entire undocumented population that is underserved there," Villasenor said. "That's why I want to start a legal aid organization that isn't federally funded. I want to educate people on their rights."

Last year, Villasenor visited Mexico. It was her first visit as an adult. Seeking to process the difference between who she's become and what her life could have been, she brought a journal.

She wrote every day.

"I thought about my privilege. I remember riding a bus with people my age in ripped clothing who were probably uneducated and without employment opportunities," Villasenor said. "Until then I was grateful for my opportunities, but I was stressing about financing a legal education. But these people were thinking about how to stay alive."

Early in Villasenor's enrollment in law school, she feared she could only afford a semester or two of classes. On top of her academic duties, she was working on her own adjustment of immigration status.

Then she reached out to the East Bay Community Law Center and connected with Staff Attorney Prerna Lal.

"Meeting her was an 'oh my God' experience," Villasenor said. "I'm active in the immigrants' rights movement, so I've Googled her before. I was very impressed the center hired a formerly undocumented person of color to support me."

Lal was so committed to seeing Villasenor earn permanent residency that she traveled to San Jose to attend Villasenor's final interview with immigration officials.

"She was right there and prepared to step in and support me. It was wonderful," Villasenor said.

With employment at a plaintiff's side firm in Bakersfield lined up after graduation, Villasenor is on a path to achieve her goal of assisting similarly situated people. She can also apply for naturalization in 2019.

"I definitely plan to become a citizen," Villasenor said.



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**THE MOGIN LAW FIRM, P.C.** specializes in representing businesses, entrepreneurs, consumers and investors in **antitrust, unfair competition** and **complex business litigation**. We have participated in some of the largest antitrust cases in the United States and are frequently requested to participate in cases by other law firms.

## Mogin Law Firm, P.C. Directs Generous Cy Pres Award to EBCLC

EBCLC would like to thank Daniel Mogin and the attorneys at the Mogin Law Firm, P.C. for directing a generous cy pres award of over \$170,000 in support of EBCLC's efforts to provide free, high-quality legal services to the East Bay's most vulnerable residents. This cy pres award comes as the result of a settlement in a class action lawsuit against Honeywell International, Inc. As EBCLC continues to expand its work to meet the pressing need for legal aid in the East Bay, we are truly grateful for supporters like the Mogin Law Firm for its investment in bolstering legal services and increasing access to justice in our community.

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### Election Day by Tirien Steinbach

I'm cynical and weary  
But I VOTE  
From hopeful I'm now leery  
But I VOTE  
Our people marched and died  
So I VOTE  
And rights are still denied  
So I VOTE  
To invest in schools and health  
I VOTE  
To put workers before wealth  
I VOTE  
For the folks who still cannot  
I VOTE  
Because the planet's way too hot  
I VOTE  
Because SCOTUS is ours to lose  
I VOTE

For a woman's right to choose  
I VOTE  
For my children and all the rest  
I VOTE  
As a call to try our best  
I VOTE  
Although I'm skeptical and jaded  
I VOTE  
Because the hatemongers hate it  
I VOTE  
Because change happens through evolution  
I VOTE  
...At least until the revolution  
I VOTE!

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## Advance Justice Today!

Your investment helps EBCLC advance justice and expand opportunity to low-income community members in the areas of housing, health, income support, civic participation and economic development.

