

Hispanic Heritage Month Speakers Enlighten Conversation Around Immigration



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Winston's Diversity & Inclusion Committee and Latina/o Lawyers Alliance at Winston (LLAW) affinity group hosted a firmwide teleconference on October 3 featuring veteran journalist Laura Wides-Muñoz and 25-year-old DREAMer and immigration advocate Hareth Andrade Ayala.

Partner and LLAW Chair [Steve Flores](#) introduced Wides-Muñoz, who told firm members, clients, and alumni in attendance why she wrote her book titled *The Making of a Dream: How a Group of Young Undocumented Immigrants Helped Change What It Means to be American*. We weren't getting anywhere on reforming the immigration system, she explained, but a new movement by a burgeoning group of young people on the ground provided an opening for expanding the conversation.



Wides-Muñoz spent nearly a decade following five young undocumented immigrants, capturing their stories of discovering they were undocumented, the difficulties this presented in their efforts to attend college or gain employment, and their “visceral nausea” caused by the conflict between begging to stay in America and risking betrayal of loved ones here illegally. Andrade Ayala, whose grandparents brought her and her sister to the United States from Bolivia, is one of the young immigrants featured in Wides-Muñoz’s book.

“Being Hispanic means having mixed status,” she explained. Andrade Ayala and her sister have DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), which has provided temporary relief from deportation and work authorization to 800,000 young adult undocumented immigrants brought to the United States as children. DREAMers like Andrade Ayala continue to advocate for a path to permanent legal status through federal legislation.

Such legislation, the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, was passed by the House but fell five votes short in the Senate. Andrade Ayala, then in high school, was there to witness the Senate vote in 2010. After learning of her undocumented status during a college visit, she rallied her classmates to collect signatures in support of the DREAM Act and sent the petition to her Senator. “There were hundreds of young people like us, and we realized there was a movement beyond signing a petition,” she said. “I wanted to be part of that.”

Andrade Ayala went on to form DREAMers of Virginia to advocate for access to college as well as reform of immigration laws. The power of the community that Andrade Ayala and others have built around this issue was successfully brought to bear in stopping the deportation of her father when he was detained after a traffic stop. This community includes Winston attorneys who volunteer their time assisting immigrant families.

While Americans are conflicted on a number of questions, the gut reaction to the separation of immigrant families has more people grappling with the complexity of the system, Wides-Muñoz said. “The notion that the problem can be solved person-by-person is untenable.” She expressed the need for tough discussions and compromise on both

sides to reach a policy solution that balances the desire for limits on immigration with compassion for impacted families.

This program was part of Winston’s annual series that celebrates the diversity that exists at the firm and helps foster an inclusive work environment. Visit our [Diversity & Inclusion](#) page for more information.

2 Min Read

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