

Sylvia Puente

Sylvia Puente is the Executive Director of the Latino Policy Forum, the only Latino public policy and advocacy organization in Illinois. Puente has earned a national reputation as a bridge builder and a trailblazer, having been recognized by Hispanic Business Magazine as one of the "100 Most Influential Hispanics in the U.S."

She works tirelessly with nonprofit leaders, elected officials and corporate partners to improve educational outcomes for children, to make housing more accessible and affordable while promoting just immigration reform and building the influence and leadership of Latinos for the betterment of all Illinois.

Puente is a proud Chicago native who was introduced to her life's work in advocacy, policy and activism at the young age of 13, when she joined her mother on picket lines in support of the United Farm Workers union. She was the first in her family to graduate college and earned a BA in Economics from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She did graduate studies at Harvard Kennedy School of Government and earned her Master's Degree from the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago.

Sylvia is regularly called upon to provide perspective on the implications of the nation's changing demographics and is frequently cited in the media as an expert on Latino issues and has published numerous reports that articulate the vital role they play in society.

Puente's 35-year career serving her community spans a wide range of experiences: From 2001-08 she served as director of the Center for Metropolitan Chicago Initiatives for the University of Notre Dame's Institute for Latino Studies. Her work also included the publication of the first ever publications on Latino growth in the Chicago suburbs, "Bordering the Mainstream: A Needs Assessment of Latinos in Berwyn and Cicero, Illinois," and "Forging the Tools for Unity: A report on Metro Chicago's Mayors Roundtables on Latino Integration."

Puente was selected by Governor JB Pritzker to serve on his transition team, the Educational Success Committee, which was tasked with tackling the state's educational issues. Additionally, she received appointments from two previous Illinois governors to the Illinois Education Funding Advisory Board and the Illinois Early Learning Council, and is a board director of Advance Illinois, a public policy agency working to improve education in the State.

Among her many accolades throughout her career, Sylvia is a fellow of Leadership Greater Chicago, and a recipient of a fellowship from the Chicago Community Trust. She is most proud of leadership awards from the University of Illinois, where she is the only Latina whose portrait hangs in the student union among other notable alums; the University of Chicago, which named her Outstanding Leader of Color; the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the Illinois Latino Legislative Caucus Foundation; the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund's (MALDEF) Community Service Award; the National Museum of Mexican Art's Sor Juana Women of Achievement Award for Community Service and last but not least, the National Football League's Hispanic Heritage Leadership Award presented by the Chicago Bears. Lastly, she was one of 25 Chicago area women named a "Pioneer for Social Justice."