

## **Carmen M. Chavez – 2026 Prebys Leadership Award Remarks**

Thank you to the Prebys Foundation for this meaningful honor. I am truly proud to stand alongside leaders who are strengthening San Diego in so many ways.

I accept this award on behalf of the entire Casa Cornelia Law Center team — our staff, volunteer attorneys, interpreters, translators, board members, and community partners. Most importantly, I share this recognition with our brave clients, whose courage and resilience inspire our work every day.

This recognition reflects what is possible when a community commits to justice, dignity, and shared responsibility.

I began at Casa Cornelia more than two decades ago, where I started as a volunteer. I stayed because I saw the transformative power of legal representation.

Casa Cornelia is a San Diego–based nonprofit public interest law firm that provides quality pro bono legal services grounded in justice and compassion to survivors of human and civil rights violations. We serve asylum seekers, unaccompanied children, and survivors of serious crimes — individuals navigating a complex legal system without the means to afford legal counsel.

In today’s immigration environment, many families face profound uncertainty. Laws evolve. Policies shift — sometimes seemingly overnight.

But one principle remains constant: due process matters.

Ensuring that every person has access to a fair hearing is not about politics — it is about the integrity of our legal system. When we uphold the rule of law with compassion, we reinforce public trust and strengthen the social fabric of our region.

Being “all in” means recognizing that the stability of immigrant families is directly connected to the stability of our broader community.

When a survivor of violence gains legal protection, they can work, contribute, and rebuild their lives. When a child receives stability instead of uncertainty, that child becomes part of San Diego’s future workforce, leadership, and civic life.

Justice with compassion creates ripple effects that extend far beyond any single case. Access to legal representation is one of the clearest ways we can promote safety, accountability, and opportunity in our community.

This award is not simply recognition — it is also an opportunity for collective action.

To the attorneys in this room: partner with us in pro bono representation. Your expertise can change the trajectory of a family’s life.

To multilingual leaders and professionals: lend your language skills as interpreters and translators. Language access is access to justice.

To philanthropic and civic partners: invest in due process. Support sustainable legal services that protect the most vulnerable and strengthen institutional fairness.

And to fellow community leaders help elevate informed dialogue about immigration rooted in dignity, facts, and shared responsibility.

Access to justice should not depend on income. It depends on leadership.

We are proud to be all in for San Diego. And when we commit to justice with compassion, we are not only defending individual rights — we are defining the character of our community.

Thank you.