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December 10, 2015

RE: HCBA 2015 Outstanding Lawyer Award Nomination of Steve Barbas

To Whom It May Concern:

I hope this letter finds you doing well.

On behalf of the Tampa Hispanic Bar Association (THBA) Officers and Board members, I am writing to nominate our friend, colleague and long-time Board member Steve Barbas for the HCBA Outstanding Lawyer Award.

Much of this I write from a personal perspective from my personally knowing my friend Steve for almost twelve years.

However, first I want to make some points that I know every single THBA Officer and Board member can support. Since the founding of our organization, Steve has been an active Board member. In fact, among our Board members, Steve is the one that - among us - has (by far and away) the greatest amount of respect. We all see Steve as not only a friend and colleague, but a valued mentor whose opinion counts a great deal. In part because of that level of respect and admiration, in 2013, we gave Steve the THBA Spirit of Tampa award, which is given to someone whose commitments to our City and community are unparalleled.

Truly, Steve Barbas as a person is unparalleled. That is what causes all of us to so deeply and genuinely admire this fine man. This is a man who makes his mother and the spirit of his late father proud not because of the car he drives, or the neighborhood he lives in, but because of how he treats others.

Steve's accomplishments as an attorney are outstanding and are something that he, his family (including his mother, siblings, wife of more than 30 years, two daughters, son-in-law and soon-to-be born granddaughter) and closest friends should be proud of. Since 1979, Steve has been an outstanding and aggressive litigator here in Tampa. Steve is the managing partner of the Barbas Nunez Sanders Butler & Hovsepian law firm, a firm which, for decades, has served this community and has a remarkable reputation.

In addition to being the managing partner of this outstanding firm, Steve is a Tampa City Attorney who handles, along with his partner Gray Sanders, virtually all of the City of Tampa's workers' compensation cases. This is a position he has held for the longest time - Steve has survived Mayor after Mayor, and City Attorney after City Attorney - all because of his outstanding professional reputation and commitment to excellence. And time and time again, Steve has been recognized by his community for his work - earning again and again Florida Elite Attorney by Florida Trend, Super Lawyer and numerous other awards.

But it is Steve's personal decency and moral compass which is most compelling. This is a man who is truly one of the finest and most well respected attorneys in this community. He began to practice law when I was merely one year old and is today truly respected.

Yet, there is not an ounce of pride or vanity in this man. Steve is a man who gives a Federal Judge the same amount of respect and deference that he gives a waiter, working for the Minimum Wage, serving him at a local restaurant. To Steve, it is not one's position or title that will guide what level of respect he gives you, but the mere fact that that person is a person. And Steve is a man of fine values - informed by his religious faith and moral compass. In short, Steve is the same man on Saturday night as he is on Sunday morning. Steve's work in the pride of his educational life - Jesuit and Loyola - is second to none. He works to instill values of decency in these institutions, and serves on the board of a Catholic foundation at Loyola dedicated to civic and social advocacy on behalf of those without a voice.

On a personal level, I have had the pleasure of knowing Steve for twelve years. While in law school, I clerked for Steve's firm. I remember the first time I met him. I came into his office with another intern and he sat us down, and began to lecture us - with the greatest amount of sincerity - about the nobility of the law practice and how - as Americans - the world is our oyster, as this is the Land of Opportunity.

I clerked there and would go on to become an attorney. And Steve was also the guy I would call on pressing professional issues. When I was laid off from a law firm, I called Steve. When I thought about switching firms, I would call Steve. And when I had professional concerns, Steve was always the man I could trust - and still do.

In fact, about seven and a half years ago, I called Steve saying I was thinking about joining Ogden Sullivan, and he remarked that he was dearest friends with the managing partner I was interviewing with. Steve went to bat for me and, as a result, I got the job.

I am indebted to Steve, however, not just for this very nice gesture, but for the example he has set for me and other Officers and Board members in the THBA and the entire Bar.

The so-called "greatness" of Steve is the example he sets for others. Steve is not only a man who sees the law as a noble calling, but a man who sees his role as a husband, father, brother and son as a holy calling. Steve knows that when he dies and goes to St. Peter's Gates, he will not be asked about how many hours he billed. Instead, he will be judged by how good of a father, husband, friend, brother and son he was. And he will be judged by how he treated that waiter or waitress at the local restaurant earning the Minimum Wage and having a rough day.

I can tell you that as a friend and colleague of Steve that he passes all of these moral challenges marvelously. We all at the THBA join in this sentiment.

Steve is truly a fine and decent man, whose contributions to this community are second to none.

For this, and so many other reasons, this man deserves this honor.

Please do not hesitate to contact me to further discuss this letter.

Sincerely,

Luis Viera
On Behalf of the Tampa Hispanic Bar Association