



From the office of the President & CEO

Dear Friend,

Although today is my first day as Bet Tzedek's President & CEO, it's not my first day at the agency. In fact, two weeks ago I celebrated eight years with this remarkable organization which has come to feel like my professional home. I know my way around the office, and already work alongside admired colleagues and cherished community partners. Nevertheless, the inevitable "first-day jitters" certainly exist as I embark upon the exhilarating journey of leading Bet Tzedek as its CEO. They are jitters of excitement as I imagine what we can build together at the house of justice.



Diego, 2 years old, El Salvador

Before looking to the future, I want to introduce myself (or re-introduce myself to you in a different way if you already know me).

I am an immigrant. I was born in El Salvador and moved to this country with my parents when I was 2 years old. My parents and I watched Sesame Street together to learn English.

As a working-class family, my father maintained his factory job for over 25 years while my mom stayed home to care for me and my brother until she ultimately went back to school to become a registered nurse. She too recently retired after dedicating her career to caring for premature babies as a neonatal nurse.

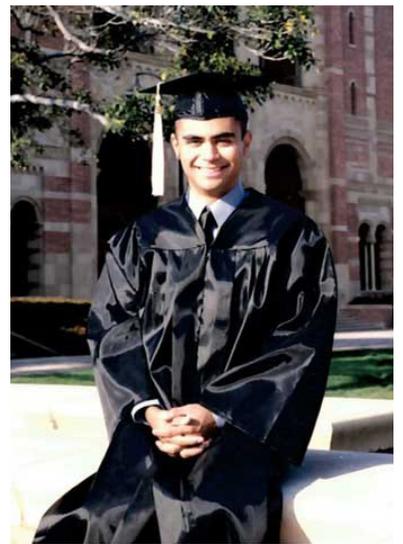
My parents instilled in me a passion and drive for learning which propelled me to the top of my high school class and onward to UCLA. After college I taught at an elementary school. My students were the children of migrant farm workers facing myriad legal issues. I regularly found myself teaching children who faced the trauma of being evicted from their homes and parents who asked for help with their immigration questions. As a teacher, I could not meet these needs and **it was then I decided to go to law school so that I could impact lives beyond what I could accomplish in the classroom.**

I was the first in my family to apply to graduate school, and the first to attend law school. Thanks to UCLA's Law Fellows Program, I received an LSAT prep course scholarship, while my parents lent me money for my application fees. When I was admitted to UCLA School of Law, it felt like I had found my path.

After my first year of law school, I interned in the family law unit of the Los Angeles Center for Law and Justice (LACLJ). Later, after continuing to volunteer with the agency, Latham & Watkins selected and funded my Equal Justice Works fellowship proposal to provide family law services to pregnant and parenting teens served by LACLJ.

While at LACLJ, I learned a lesson that completely changed my career trajectory. While working with a team of attorneys from the private bar who helped represent one of my clients, **I realized I could maximize my community impact by recruiting and training volunteer attorneys to expand and leverage the scope of our work.** I decided that deploying the talents of volunteers was how I could best serve the community, and so I joined the Alliance for Children's Rights to run their pro bono program.

After four years with The Alliance, I joined Bet Tzedek in 2012 as its Director of Pro Bono Programs. As a renowned legal services agency with a nationally recognized pro bono program, it was easy for me to decide to apply to join Bet Tzedek. As I dug a little deeper, I came to realize that **joining Bet Tzedek would mean joining an organization with principles rooted in Jewish tradition and culture, principles that helped guide the organization and that spoke to me on a very personal level.**



Diego, UCLA Graduation 1999



Jason Armond/LA Times

After three years of serving as Bet Tzedek's Director of Pro Bono Programs, I was promoted to Vice President, Pro Bono. During this time, we: developed new clinic participation opportunities for law firms and in-house legal department volunteers; expanded our reach to serve abused, abandoned, and neglected immigrant children in securing legal residency; and launched our Small Business Legal Academy to meet the need for comprehensive legal services for entrepreneurs in underserved communities.

In 2017, I became Bet Tzedek's Vice President of Legal Programs, working alongside my colleagues to design and launch various flagship programs, including the Preventing and Ending Homelessness Project, Family

Preparedness Program, Harbor-UCLA Medical Legal Partnership, and SSI Advocacy Project.

As I start this new chapter as President & CEO, I am deeply humbled to be trusted with this important role during a moment when there is so much at stake. **Our city, our state, our country and our world face major challenges that have rarely been seen before. Bet Tzedek is here, and will be here, standing with and working among the communities we serve, from Holocaust survivors whose dignity, health and well-being we help preserve to the abused, abandoned and neglected immigrant children whose future we help to build.** Together, with each of you, we will continue to bring justice to those who need it most.

Thank you for your ongoing, generous support. I look forward to our continued partnership.

Diego Cartagena
President & CEO

PS I hope to see you at our Annual Gala Dinner on February 27th. And if you'd like to get together to talk about the future of Bet Tzedek, please be in touch with my assistant, Maddie Lipton at mlipton@bettzedek.org. I'd love to show you around the office.