



Press Release

For Immediate Release
March 24, 2008

Contact: John N. Heathcliff
Public Counsel
Cell (323) 821-8731

Public Counsel Names Hernán D. Vera New President and C.E.O.

***~ Nationally Recognized Consumer Rights Attorney Takes The Helm Of
Nation's Largest Pro Bono Public Interest Law Firm ~***

Following a nationwide search, the Board of Directors of Public Counsel voted to approve the appointment of Hernán D. Vera to be its new President and Chief Executive Officer. Vera assumes the position effective immediately.

Public Counsel Chairperson Wayne Barsky of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP observed, "Our Search Committee and Board of Directors were extremely impressed by Hernán's extraordinary success as Directing Attorney of Public Counsel's Consumer Law Project, his passion and commitment to our mission, and his distinctive vision for the growth and expansion of Public Counsel. Hernán has our complete confidence, and we look forward to his leadership."

Last year, Vera worked with the Los Angeles City Attorney, the ACLU and private law firms on nationally publicized litigation to end the abusive practice known as "hospital dumping," which has been covered by world press and media including *60 Minutes*, CNN and *NBC Dateline* and led to widespread systemic reform at local, state and national levels. In 2003, working in coalition with the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, Vera led a successful lawsuit that led to landmark legislation – the "Wondries Bill" – expanding consumer protections for limited-English speaking consumers.

Vera joined Public Counsel in May 2002 as Directing Attorney of its Consumer Law Project. He has risen to become one of the nation's leading consumer rights' advocates and has supervised hundreds of individual client litigation matters involving consumer fraud. Currently, he is overseeing dozens of cases involving alleged fraud by home loan brokers and lenders, which threaten families and senior citizens with the loss of their homes. "I want to congratulate Mr. Vera, and I look forward to working with Public Counsel. It's clear that there's a real need for representation for homeowners who've been harmed in the subprime mortgage crisis," commented United States Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.).

The 37-year old Vera, who will be Public Counsel's seventh President and C.E.O. said, "It is an honor to have been selected to lead Public Counsel. For nearly four decades, Public Counsel has been a beacon of justice, hope and opportunity – a voice for the voiceless in our society. I look forward to working closely with our dedicated Board members, generous supporters and immensely talented staff to uphold and strengthen the fundamental principle that every man, woman and child is entitled to equal access to justice. It is the cornerstone of our democracy."

Vera joined Public Counsel in May 2002 as Directing Attorney of its Consumer Law Project, one of its largest and busiest legal projects. In this role, he has supervised and managed hundreds of individual client litigation matters involving consumer fraud. The Consumer Law Project also operates the largest Debtor Assistance Project in Los Angeles, assisting low-income individuals and families facing bankruptcy, as well as a variety of consumer education programs and legislative advocacy initiatives.

Prior to joining Public Counsel, Vera worked for O'Melveny & Myers LLP and the Mexican American Legal and Educational Defense Fund. After graduating from the UCLA School of Law, he clerked for the Honorable Consuelo B. Marshall in the United States District Court for the Central District of California. He received his B.A. with Distinction from Stanford University in 1991. Vera is fluent in Spanish and the son of Argentine immigrants.

Hernán D. Vera succeeds Dan Grunfeld, who left Public Counsel last September after ten years to become Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy for Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. Grunfeld said, "Hernán has distinguished himself as one of the top public interest lawyers in the country. His compassion for clients, extensive experience dealing with the legal issues they face and his deep understanding of the systemic issues involved make him the perfect choice to lead Public Counsel in the years ahead."

About Public Counsel

Founded in 1970, Public Counsel is the largest public interest *pro bono* law firm in the world. Over the last 38 years, Public Counsel has recruited and trained over 35,000 volunteers and delivered over a quarter of a billion dollars in free assistance to those who need it most. Last year, with the help of more than 3,400 volunteer lawyers, law students, social workers and others who donated more than 150,000 hours of time, Public Counsel assisted nearly 27,000 individuals, including hundreds of nonprofit organizations and micro businesses, ultimately providing almost \$70 million in free services.

Nationally, Public Counsel has been a leader in developing model programs and assisting other *pro bono* public interest law firms to bring these programs to their communities. In addition to serving the vast Los Angeles metropolitan region, Public Counsel is actively helping to strengthen *pro bono* public interest law internationally. In 2000, Public Counsel was instrumental in creating the *Instituto Pro bono* in Brazil, that country's first public interest *pro bono* law firm. Since that time Public Counsel has played a central role in nurturing other *pro bono* programs in Brazil, Argentina, Europe, Africa and Australia.