



*Official Naming Request*

*for*

*Oswaldo Soto*

*Miami-Dade County*

*Courthouse*

October 11, 2024

***Re: Naming of Courthouse After Osvaldo Soto***

Dear Honorable Mayor and Members of the Miami-Dade County Commission:

On behalf of the Cuban American Bar Association ("CABA"), its Board of Directors, its Past Presidents, and members of the Miami-Dade community, we respectfully submit this formal request for the naming of the new Miami-Dade courthouse in honor of Osvaldo Soto. Throughout his life, Mr. Soto was a trailblazing lawyer, civil rights advocate, and lifelong defender of equality and justice for the Hispanic and minority communities in South Florida. His name would serve as a meaningful tribute to our community's past and as a beacon for its future.

We present this nomination with great respect, not only to recognize the monumental contributions of Mr. Soto, but also to acknowledge the pivotal role his daughter, the Honorable Bertila Soto, played in making this courthouse a reality. Judge Soto, herself a distinguished member of CABA and the former Chief Judge of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit in and for Miami-Dade County, worked tirelessly to ensure that the funding for this critical project was secured, overcoming significant challenges along the way. Without her leadership and the support of several key community leaders, this courthouse would not exist today. In great part, she has credited her father with inspiring her extraordinary commitment and diligence.

**Osvaldo Soto's Life and Legacy**

Osvaldo Soto was a man of extraordinary vision and dedication who, for more than half a century, worked to dismantle barriers of discrimination and create opportunities for those often marginalized in Miami's diverse and ever-changing society. Born in Havana, Cuba in 1929, Mr. Soto began his practice after studying law at the University of Havana. Although originally participating in the revolution to oust dictator Fulgencio Batista, he became deeply disillusioned with the Cuban Revolution's dictatorial rule and fled to the United States in search of freedom. In Miami, he found a city both rich in diversity and fraught with social tensions, where Hispanics, minorities, and immigrant communities as a whole were often discriminated against and excluded from positions of leadership and influence.

Mr. Soto's personal experiences as a Cuban exile gave him a profound understanding of the struggles that immigrants faced in a new land. It was this deep empathy that fueled his relentless fight for civil rights in South Florida. After participating in the Bay of Pigs Invasion as a member of the Assault Brigade 2506, and subsequently through his involvement in CABA, and as president of the Spanish American League Against Discrimination ("SALAD"), which he co-founded, Mr. Soto focused his life's work on combating discrimination based on race and ethnicity.

### ***Championing Minority Representation in Law Enforcement***

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Mr. Soto turned his attention to the underrepresentation of Hispanics in local law enforcement, despite the Hispanic population in Miami reaching over 50%. At that time, there was only one Hispanic officer holding a rank of sergeant or higher within the police departments of both the City of Miami and Miami-Dade County. This discrepancy was representative of the larger systemic exclusion of Hispanics from positions of influence. Through collaboration with the Hispanic and Cuban-American Police Officers Association and local officials, Mr. Soto was instrumental in integrating the police departments, working in solidarity with organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (“NAACP”) to advocate for both Hispanic and African-American participation. The positive strides he helped to advance during this period had a lasting impact on local law enforcement.

### ***Repeal of the English-Only Ordinance***

Mr. Soto’s advocacy also extended to legislative battles, most notably his role in overturning the divisive English-Only Ordinance passed in 1980.

In 1973, the Hispanic population of Miami-Dade County was approximately 25%. Government officials had difficulty communicating with the roughly 100,000 residents who spoke very little or no English. That same year, the Miami-Dade County Board of County Commissioners, along with Mayor Jack Orr, declared Miami-Dade County to be bilingual and bi-cultural, paving the way for the provision of information on government services in Spanish and English.

However, seven years later, in what was believed to be a reaction to the arrival of 125,000 Cubans to South Florida during the Mariel Boatlift of 1980, the Miami-Dade County Board of County Commissioners adopted what was labeled as the English-Only Ordinance. The ordinance prohibited the County from utilizing any language other than English in its official functions and prohibited the promotion of the diverse cultures arriving in South Florida. Such legislation made it extremely difficult for non-English speakers to access the court system and to obtain information on essential services such as water and sewer, licensing, emergency services, and other vital government amenities. Additionally, this ordinance had the unintended consequence of creating discrimination in the workplace. A substantial number of employers, believing that the law applied to the private sector, prohibited employees from speaking their native language at work, in violation of state and federal laws.

Led by Osvaldo Soto and other key members, SALAD launched a tireless 13-year campaign demanding its repeal. After years of mobilizing community organizations, including League of United Latin American Citizens (“LULAC”), the American Civil Liberties Union (“ACLU”), and the Black Lawyers Association (now known as the Wilkie D. Ferguson, Jr. Bar Association), they achieved a landmark victory in 1993 when the Miami-Dade County Board of Commissioners finally repealed the ordinance, restoring linguistic inclusivity for the region and its growing immigrant population.

### ***Pioneering the English-Plus Movement***

In the mid-1980s, Mr. Soto pioneered the English-Plus movement, a response to efforts by Secretary of Education William Bennett to scale back bilingual education. Mr. Soto boldly advocated that, while English proficiency was crucial for success in the U.S., the ability to

speak multiple languages was essential in the global economy. The movement gained national recognition, attracting support from educators, business leaders, and policymakers.

### ***Creative Activism in Local Government***

Oswaldo Soto likewise tackled disparities in local government representation. In the mid-1980s, despite Hispanics comprising up to 40% of Miami Beach’s population, the city employed only ***one*** Hispanic worker. Mr. Soto, along with SALAD, took innovative measures to draw attention to the issue, flying a banner over the beach that read, “Miami Beach Equals Hispanic Discrimination.” The action garnered significant media attention and led to discussions with city leaders. The result was a commitment from then-Mayor Seymour Gelber to create a workforce that was representative of the community. Shortly afterward, respected Hispanic attorney José Garcia Pedrosa was appointed as City Manager of Miami Beach.

### ***El Votatón - Voter Registration Movement***

Among Mr. Soto’s most notable contributions was his role in organizing voter registration drives in the early 1980s. Under the banner of “*Vota Para Que Te Respeten*” (Vote in Order to be Respected), Mr. Soto and SALAD collaborated with Cuban-American and other Hispanic organizations to address the difficulties faced by many Hispanics in registering to vote. On September 17, 1983, SALAD spearheaded the historic *El Votatón* event at the Jai Alai Fronton, a 12-hour voter registration drive that would become a model for similar efforts nationwide. As a result, voter registration among Hispanics surged, and the event attracted attention from groups like LULAC and the National Council of La Raza.

### ***Champion of Minority Representation***

In the legal community, Oswaldo Soto was instrumental in increasing Hispanic and minority representation in the judicial system. He believed that South Florida’s elected officials should reflect the community that they represented and ceaselessly encouraged minorities to run for judicial and other public office.

As a longtime member and past president of CABA, Mr. Soto led the charge in diversifying the organization, pushing for the inclusion of non-Cuban-American members, an effort that took great courage during a time when divisions along ethnic lines were more pronounced than they are today. His leadership in these initiatives helped to shape CABA into a robust, inclusive, dynamic, and respected organization.

Mr. Soto’s steadfast belief in fairness and justice guided him to advocate for qualified individuals, irrespective of race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. In 1998, in the face of public criticism, he famously supported Scott Bernstein, an openly gay candidate for a judicial position. This inclusive approach not only set a powerful example for others in the legal field, but also demonstrated Mr. Soto’s unwavering commitment to a judiciary that reflects the diversity of the community that it serves.

### **The Legacy Continues: Judge Bertila Soto’s Contributions**

Not only does Oswaldo Soto’s legacy make him a fitting namesake for the new courthouse, but the contributions of his daughter, Former Chief Judge Bertila Soto, echo the incredibly important work that he spent his life advancing. As the first female Cuban-American to serve as Chief Judge of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit, Judge Soto has been a trailblazer in her own

right. Naming the courthouse after Osvaldo Soto would therefore not only honor his life's work, but would also recognize the integral role that Judge Soto plays in South Florida today.

**The Need for Representation**

Out of Miami-Dade County's eleven courthouses, none are named after a Hispanic individual. This is a striking omission in a county where Hispanics have played such a central role in shaping the legal, political, economic, and social landscape. The naming of the new courthouse after a pivotal Hispanic attorney and leader presents a unique opportunity to correct this oversight and to honor a man whose contributions to the South Florida community, at large, are immeasurable.

Osvaldo Soto's legacy is one of inclusion, fairness, and progress. His efforts helped to transform Miami-Dade into the culturally diverse and thriving county that it is today. Naming the courthouse after him would send a powerful message to the community and the State—that Miami-Dade honors those who have fought for equality and that it recognizes the indispensable contributions of its numerous Hispanic residents. In support of this request, we anticipate that hundreds of residents—leaders, activists, and civic-minded community representatives alike—will come forward to give testimony, each sharing about how Osvaldo Soto's work profoundly changed their lives and the fabric of Miami-Dade County as a whole.

In sum, we respectfully urge the Miami-Dade County Commission to name the new courthouse in honor of Osvaldo Soto. His life's work as a lawyer, activist, and champion of civil rights represents the very best of Miami-Dade's history and values and his lasting legacy is the foundation upon which our County should continue to build. The courthouse, which stands as a symbol of justice, would be a fitting tribute to a man who dedicated his life to ensuring that justice was accessible to all.

We thank you for your consideration and are available to provide any additional information or support that may be needed as you deliberate on this important decision.

Sincerely,

**Cuban American Bar Association, Board of Directors and Past Presidents:**

/s/ Ramón Abadín

Ramón Abadín

/s/ Francisco R. Angones

Francisco R. Angones

/s/ Fernando S. Aran

Fernando S. Aran

/s/ Diana Arteaga

Diana Arteaga

/s/ Candice Balmori

Candice Balmori

/s/ Emily K. Balter

Emily K. Balter

/s/ A. Dax Bello

A. Dax Bello

/s/ Armando J. Bucelo

Armando J. Bucelo

/s/ Daniel Buigas

Daniel Buigas

/s/ Antonio Castro

Antonio Castro

/s/ Gustavo J. Ceballos

Gustavo J. Ceballos

/s/ Eduardo Cosio

Eduardo Cosio

/s/ J. Raul Cosio

J. Raul Cosio

/s/ Manuel L. Crespo

Manuel L. Crespo

/s/ Frances de la Guardia

Frances de la Guardia

/s/ Vivan C. de las Cuevas

Vivan C. de las Cuevas

/s/ Rogelio A. del Pino

Rogelio A. del Pino

/s/ Michael Diaz

Michael Diaz

/s/ Victor Diaz

Victor Diaz

/s/ Amanda Fernandez

Amanda Fernandez

/s/ Katherine Fernandez-Rundle

Katherine Fernandez-  
Rundle

/s/ Sandra M. Ferrera

Sandra M. Ferrera

/s/ Roberto F. Fleitas Jr.

Roberto F. Fleitas Jr.

/s/ Tomas F. Gamba

Tomas F. Gamba

/s/ Anna Marie Gamez

Anna Marie Gamez

/s/ Maria D. Garcia

Maria D. Garcia

/s/ Manuel A. Garcia-Linares

Manuel A. Garcia-Linares

/s/ Jose A. Garrido

Jose A. Garrido

/s/ Giselle Gutierrez

Giselle Gutierrez

/s/ Elizabeth Hernandez

Elizabeth Hernandez

/s/ Eugenio Hernandez

Eugenio Hernandez

/s/ Jorge L. Hernandez-Torano

Jorge L. Hernandez-Torano

/s/ Javier A. Ley- Soto

Javier A. Ley- Soto

/s/ Javier A. Lopez

Javier A. Lopez

/s/ Jordi Martinez-Cid

Jordi Martinez-Cid

/s/ Ricardo Martinez-Cid

Ricardo Martinez-Cid

/s/ Sergio L. Mendez  
Sergio L. Mendez

/s/ Victoria Mendez  
Victoria Mendez

/s/ Patrick Montoya  
Patrick Montoya

/s/ Manuel R. Morales Jr.  
Manuel R. Morales Jr.

/s/ Rene V. Murai  
Rene V. Murai

/s/ Isis Pacheco Velasco  
Isis Pacheco Velasco

/s/ Joshua P. Padron  
Joshua P. Padron

/s/ Augusto Perera  
Augusto Perera

/s/ Jorge L. Piedra  
Jorge L. Piedra

/s/ Marlene Quintana  
Marlene Quintana

/s/ Fabian Ruiz  
Fabian Ruiz

/s/ Roland Sanchez-Medina Jr.  
Roland Sanchez-Medina Jr.

/s/ Haydee M. Sera  
Haydee M. Sera

/s/ Miriam Soler Ramos  
Miriam Soler Ramos

/s/ Manuel Vazquez  
Manuel Vazquez

/s/ Jose A. Villalobos  
Jose A. Villalobos

#### **Legal and Community Leaders**

/s/ Anay Abraham  
Anay Abraham

/s/ Nelson Albareda  
Nelson Albareda

/s/ Jonathan Alfonso  
Jonathan Alfonso

/s/ Pedro Allende  
Pedro Allende

/s/ Robert J. Alonso  
Robert J. Alonso

/s/ Cesar Alvarez  
Cesar Alvarez

/s/Michael J. Alvarez

Michael J. Alvarez

/s/Georgina Angones

Georgina Angones

/s/Todd Aranovitz

Todd Aranovitz

/s/Tony Argiz

Tony Argiz

/s/Paula C. Arias

Paula C. Arias

/s/David A. Armstrong

David A. Armstrong

/s/Tony Bello

Tony Bello

/s/Mitchell W. Berger

Mitchell W. Berger

/s/David Bianchi

David Bianchi

/s/Esteban Bovo, Jr.

Honorable Esteban Bovo,  
Jr.

/s/Stephen Cain

Stephen Cain

/s/Marili Cancio

Marili Cancio

/s/Michael Carmona

Michael Carmona

/s/Frank J. Carreras

Frank J. Carreras

/s/Raul Carreras

Raul Carreras

/s/Vicente Castro

Vicente Castro

/s/Jorge Chamizo

Jorge Chamizo

/s/Dr. Enrique Chavez

Dr. Enrique Chavez

/s/Lorenzo Cobiella

Lorenzo Cobiella

/s/Armando Codina

Armando Codina

/s/Richard P. Cole

Richard P. Cole

/s/Stephanie A. Cruz

Stephanie A. Cruz

/s/Tania Cruz-Gimenez

Tania Cruz-Gimenez

/s/Manuel Cuervo

Manuel Cuervo

/s/Giancarlo Cueto

Giancarlo Cueto

/s/Carlos Curbelo

Carlos Curbelo

/s/Barón DaParré

Barón DaParré



/s/ Juan D'arce

Juan D'arce

/s/ Madelin D'arce

Madelin D'arce

/s/ Albert de Cardenas

Albert de Cardenas

/s/ Mirta de Perales

Mirta de Perales

/s/ Amanda Demanda

Amanda Demanda

/s/ José Félix Díaz

José Félix Díaz

/s/ Manny Diaz

Honorable Manny Diaz

/s/ Albert E. Dotson, Jr.

Albert E. Dotson, Jr.

/s/ Iris Escara

Iris Escara

/s/ Cristina Estevez

Cristina Estevez

/s/ Tom Falcon

Tom Falcon

/s/ Jorge "Toti" Fernandez

Jorge "Toti" Fernandez

/s/ Lino Fernandez

Lino Fernandez

/s/ Guillermo Fernandez

Guillermo Fernandez

/s/ Wifredo A. Ferrer

Wifredo A. Ferrer

/s/ Esteban E. Formoso

Esteban E. Formoso

/s/ Jorge Fors

Jorge Fors

/s/ Jorge L. Fors, Jr.

Jorge L. Fors, Jr.

/s/ Gary Fox

Gary Fox

/s/ Eduardo Garcia

Eduardo Garcia

/s/ Andrea Genden

Andrea Genden

/s/ Michael Genden

Ret. Judge, Honorable  
Michael Genden

/s/ Andrew Genden

Andrew Genden

/s/ Gus Gil

Gus Gil

/s/ Carlos Gimenez, Jr.

Carlos Gimenez, Jr.

/s/ Anthony Gomez

Anthony Gomez

/s/ Ricardo Gonzalez

Ricardo Gonzalez

/s/ Michael Gonzalez

Michael Gonzalez

/s/ Antonio Gonzalez

Antonio Gonzalez

/s/ Antuhan Gonzalez

Antuhan Gonzalez

/s/ Sandra Gonzalez Levy

Sandra Gonzalez Levy

/s/ Wifredo "Willy" Gort

Wifredo "Willy" Gort

/s/ Ivis Guerra

Ivis Guerra

/s/ Jordi Guso

Jordi Guso

/s/ Angel Gutierrez

Angel Gutierrez

/s/ Dr. Jose Antonio Gutierrez

Dr. Jose Antonio Gutierrez

/s/ Michael A. Haggard

Michael A. Haggard

/s/ William Hearon

William Hearon

/s/ Mario Hernandez-Fumero

Mario Hernandez-Fumero

/s/ Manuel Huerta

Manuel Huerta

/s/ Arthur Iglesias

Arthur Iglesias

/s/ Mario Jacobs

Mario Jacobs

/s/ Carlos Jimenez

Carlos Jimenez

/s/ Marcos D. Jimenez

Marcos D. Jimenez

/s/ Ross Jimenez

Ross Jimenez

/s/ Robert C. Josefsberg

Robert C. Josefsberg

/s/ Maria Marinello Korvick

Ret. Judge, Honorable Maria  
Marinello Korvick

/s/ Tony Korvick

Tony Korvick

/s/ John Kozyak

John Kozyak

/s/ Matthew E. Ladd

Matthew E. Ladd

/s/ Vince C. Lago

Vince C. Lago

/s/ Carlos Lago

Carlos Lago

/s/ Alex Lastra

Alex Lastra

/s/ Pablo Lau

Pablo Lau

/s/David Lawrence

David Lawrence

/s/Jesus Lebena

Jesus Lebena

/s/Michael Levine

Michael Levine

/s/Jorge Luis Lopez

Jorge Luis Lopez

/s/Peter D. Lopez

Peter D. Lopez

/s/Lusette Lopez

Lusette Lopez

/s/Liliam M. Lopez

Liliam M. Lopez

/s/Antonio Lorenzo

Antonio Lorenzo

/s/Robert "Bob" Martinez

Robert "Bob" Martinez

/s/Carlos Martinez

Carlos Martinez

/s/Charlie Martinez

Charlie Martinez

/s/Kenneth Masmella

Kenneth Masmella

/s/Gabriel Mazzitelli

Gabriel Mazzitelli

/s/Angel Medina

Angel Medina

/s/Mike Mena

Mike Mena

/s/Daniel Mendez

Daniel Mendez

/s/Pedro Menendez

Pedro Menendez

/s/Todd Michaels

Todd Michaels

/s/Jesus "JD" Moises

Jesus "JD" Moises

/s/Ismare Monreal

Ismare Monreal

/s/Eric Montes de Oca

Eric Montes de Oca

/s/David Morales

David Morales

/s/Richard Moran

Richard Moran

/s/Noelia Moreno

Noelia Moreno

/s/Celeste Muir

Ret. Judge, Honorable  
Celeste Muir

/s/William T. "Toby" Muir

William T. "Toby" Muir

/s/Jane W. Muir

Jane W. Muir

/s/Danny Munilla

Danny Munilla

/s/Mario Murgado

Mario Murgado

/s/Luis Naya

Luis Naya

/s/Giancarlo Novo

Giancarlo Novo

/s/Bobby Nunez

Bobby Nunez

/s/Tarlika Nunez-Navarro

Ret. Judge, Honorable Tarlika  
Nunez-Navarro

/s/Eduardo Padron

Eduardo Padron

/s/Leslie Pantin

Leslie Pantin

/s/Leslie Pantin

Leslie Pantin

/s/Bob Pardo

Bob Pardo

/s/Francisco Paredes

Francisco Paredes

/s/Dr. Daniel I. Pedreira

Dr. Daniel I. Pedreira

/s/Daniel Perera

Daniel Perera

/s/Alexander L. Perez

Alexander L. Perez

/s/Juan Carlos Perez

Juan Carlos Perez

/s/Delsy Perez-Mena

Delsy Perez-Mena

/s/Obdulio Piedra

Obdulio Piedra

/s/Cesar Pizarro

Cesar Pizarro

/s/Sofia Powell-Cosio

Sofia Powell-Cosio

/s/Peter D. Prieto

Peter D. Prieto

/s/Claudia Puig

Claudia Puig

/s/Orestes Quintanilla

Orestes Quintanilla

/s/Sabrina Ramos

Sabrina Ramos

/s/Olga Ramudo

Olga Ramudo

/s/Ramon A. Rasco

Ramon A. Rasco

/s/Ramon E. Rasco

Ramon E. Rasco

/s/Dwayne A. Robinson

Dwayne A. Robinson

/s/Eduardo Robreno

Ret. Judge, Honorable  
Eduardo Robreno

/s/Marcelo Rodriguez

Marcelo Rodriguez

/s/Aliette D. Rodz

Aliette D. Rodz

/s/Robert Roque

Robert Roque

/s/Stephen F. Rosenthal

Stephen F. Rosenthal

/s/Jennifer Ruiz

Jennifer Ruiz

/s/Rene F. Ruiz

Rene F. Ruiz

/s/Suzette Russomano

Suzette Russomano

/s/Adriana Santiesteban

Adriana Santiesteban

/s/Anthony Seijas

Anthony Seijas

/s/Guillermo Senmartin

Guillermo Senmartin

/s/Orlando Sierra

Orlando Sierra

/s/Paul Steven Singerman

Paul Steven Singerman

/s/Eduardo J. Soto

Eduardo J. Soto

/s/Eugene E. Stearns

Eugene E. Stearns

/s/Larry Stewart

Larry Stewart

/s/Jesus Suarez

Jesus Suarez

/s/Sixto Tamarit

Sixto Tamarit

/s/Michael R. Torres

Michael R. Torres

/s/Victor Torres

Victor Torres

/s/Harley S. Tropin

Harley S. Tropin

/s/Erick Valderrama

Erick Valderrama

/s/Carlos Valdes

Carlos Valdes

/s/Lawrence Valido

Lawrence Valido

/s/Angel Veliz

Angel Veliz

/s/Oswaldo Vento

Oswaldo Vento

/s/Samuel Verdeja

Samuel Verdeja

/s/Ben Widlanski

Ben Widlanski

/s/Orestes Wrves

Orestes Wrves

/s/Stephen N. Zack

Stephen N. Zack