



Thomas E. Perez, J.D., M.P.P.

Thomas Perez is a former federal prosecutor and high ranking official in the Clinton administration who has spent his entire career as a civil rights lawyer. In April 2001, he was appointed Assistant Professor and Director of Clinical Law Programs at the University of Maryland Law School. In this capacity, he teaches clinical law courses, oversees the Law School's nationally recognized clinical law programs, and is heavily involved in civil rights, health care, and criminal justice issues within Maryland, the District of Columbia, and nationally. He also works closely with the Law School's nationally recognized Law and Health program.

In addition to his duties at the University of Maryland Law School, Perez is a consultant on a variety of civil rights issues, primarily focused on police reform and the intersection of civil rights and health care. In recent months, projects have addressed a range of issues, including how to improve diversity in the health professions, eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in health status, and ensuring access to health care for people with limited English skills. These assignments have been performed on behalf of a variety of organizations, including the National Academy of Sciences, the Association of American Medical Colleges, and the California Endowment. He has provided technical assistance on civil rights issues to a host of organizations in the Washington, D.C. area and elsewhere. For instance, he has provided technical assistance to the Washington Business Group on Health, an organization representing businesses that, among other matters, are concerned about eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in health status among increasingly diverse work forces.

Perez spent the bulk of his career as a civil rights lawyer in the federal government. From February 1999 until the conclusion of the Clinton administration, he served as Director of the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In this capacity, Perez oversaw the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws in the health and human services setting and was Secretary Donna Shalala's principal adviser on civil rights issues. OCR enforces a wide range of civil rights laws, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Perez led a revitalization effort of OCR, which had been plagued by chronic underfunding and understaffing. Working in partnership with the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU), he re-organized the agency, sharpened its focus, and led the successful effort to secure the largest one-year budget increase in OCR history.

During Perez's tenure, OCR played a major role in the Department's overall Initiative to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health, and led a host of initiatives designed to address the unique challenges confronting immigrant populations, including the development of critical policy guidance on the obligations of health and human service providers under Title VI to ensure that people with limited English skills can access critical health and human services. He also played an important leadership role in a Department-wide initiative to expand opportunities for eligible people with disabilities to live in community-based settings.

Prior to this appointment, Perez served at the Department of Justice as Deputy Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, from January 1988 to February 1999. A senior adviser to Bill Lee, the Acting Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, Perez assisted in policy development and oversight over the litigation activities of the Civil Rights Division. He played a major role in the establishment of the Worker Exploitation Task Force, an interagency working group designed to combat the growing phenomenon of worker exploitation, which involved unconscionable exploitation of vulnerable immigrants, often in conditions amounting to modern day slavery.

As Deputy Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, he also oversaw the work of the Education Section, and was heavily involved in civil rights issues in the elementary, secondary and higher education contexts. For instance, he was involved in a host of cases addressing the issue of disproportionate assignment of students of color to special education programs, and the relative dearth of students of color in "gifted and talented" programs.

From 1995 to 1998, Perez was special counsel to Senator Edward M. Kennedy, serving as the principal adviser on civil rights, criminal justice, and several constitutional issues. He was heavily involved in the successful passage of the Church Arson Prevention Act in 1996, and in the development of the Hate Crimes Prevention Act.

From 1989 to 1995, Perez worked as a federal prosecutor in the Criminal Section of the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department, where he prosecuted and later supervised the prosecution of federal criminal civil rights cases involving police misconduct and hate crimes. He was an Instructor at the Attorney General's Advocacy Institute, and also provided training to law enforcement officers, in the United States and abroad, on how to prevent police misconduct. He was heavily involved in Department efforts to combat racial profiling, and received the Department's second highest award based on the successful prosecution of a high profile hate crimes case in Lubbock, Texas, wherein the defendants went on a fatal, racial-motivated crime spree directed at African Americans.

Prior to working in the Civil Rights Division, he was a law clerk from 1987 to 1989 for Judge Zita L. Weinshienk of the United States District Court for the District of Colorado. Perez received an A.B. in International Relations Political Science from Brown University in 1983, a J.D. cum laude in 1987 from Harvard Law School and a Master's in Public Policy from the John F. Kennedy School of Government in 1987.

He has written on a number of civil rights topics, including police accountability, improving diversity in the health professions, and access to health care as a civil rights issue. He has served as a consultant to the Vera Institute of Justice on police accountability issues, and in that capacity, has provided training in St. Petersburg, Russia to Russian prosecutors and investigators on prosecuting police abuse cases.

Perez, a first generation Dominican-American, lives in Takoma Park with his wife, Ann Marie (a staff attorney with the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless and former head of the Montgomery and Prince George's county office of the Maryland Legal Aid Bureau), and three children, Amalia (6) Susana (3), and Rafael (born May 31, 2002).