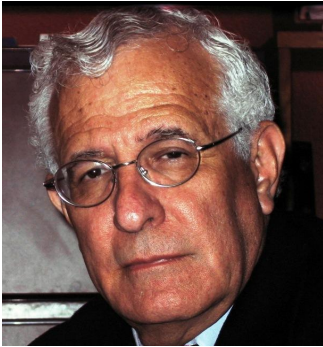


## **Giving Voice to Those Without One: A Profile of VLS Volunteer Alberto Garcia**



While Alberto Garcia's email signature features a quotation from the late labor organizer Cesar Chavez, and he describes his pro bono service as "giving voice to those without one," his presence is more that of a gentle grandfather than an agitator or activist.

As a volunteer with VLS, Mr. Garcia works with clients to expunge their criminal records. Even a minor theft conviction from adolescence or a wrongful arrest many years in the past can interfere with a person's efforts to secure employment, find housing or receive government benefits like student loans or food stamps. Clients who receive expunctions express relief and gratitude that they can finally move forward with their lives.

Mr. Garcia's legal practice has long been motivated by a desire to ensure a more equitable legal system, one responsive to the needs of poor Americans as well as those with wealth. His first job was with Legal Aid, where he practiced family law and recalled earning only \$600 a month in 1972. Now, he says, "I view my pro bono service as paying my dues to my community in exchange for earning a good living. I think most lawyers start off their careers passionate about helping their community, and then we lose it somewhere along the way."

In addition to representing individual clients, Mr. Garcia frequently regularly attends VLS' evening advice clinics at Webb and Martin Middle Schools. Bilingual in English and Spanish, he is especially helpful with clinic attendees who speak Spanish. Mr. Garcia notes that Hispanic immigrants face some distinct legal challenges, including lack of fluency in the English language and relying on verbal agreements instead of written contracts. Many Hispanics do not have wills, which can create confusion and family conflict when a family member dies intestate.

Within the VLS office, Mr. Garcia is known for his steadfast service (he's never turned down a case request!) and kind rapport with clients. We appreciate his generous contributions toward a more accessible legal system.