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# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Judge Francisco Firmat Receives 2008 Aranda Access to Justice Award**

Monterey—Judge Francisco F. Firmat, of the Superior Court of Orange County, this week received the 2008 Benjamin Aranda III Access to Justice Award for his contributions to improving the administration of justice.

The award was jointly presented by Chief Justice Ronald M. George; Mr. Stan Bissey, executive director of the California Judges Association (CJA); and Judge Ronald Taylor, chair of the Aranda Award Committee of the California Commission on Access to Justice.

The annual award is cosponsored by the Commission on Access to Justice, the Judicial Council, the State Bar, and CJA. It honors a trial judge or appellate justice whose activities demonstrate a long-term commitment to improving access to justice.

Judge Firmat, who immigrated to the U.S. from Cuba at the age of 11, is known as a humanitarian who is committed to helping disenfranchised members of the community successfully navigate their way through the court system. He has introduced a number of unique and creative programs to improve access to justice in Orange County, where he has served on both the municipal and superior courts.

After his appointment to the superior court in 1990, Judge Firmat presided over complex civil litigation and developed a reputation for successfully bringing parties together in settlement by using techniques that allowed people to resolve their disputes with dignity.

In 2001, Judge Firmat took an assignment in family law, where his influence was immediate. As a trial judge, he instituted procedures allowing Spanish-speaking self-represented parties to conduct informal, voluntary settlement conferences in their first language.

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Since 2004, he has served as the supervising judge of the superior court's family law panel. This panel of 17 judicial officers presides over domestic violence, elder abuse, family, paternity, and child support cases. Judge Firmat has cultivated a spirit among judges and staff that calls for them to serve the public as if their own family members were involved in the case.

Judge Firmat has been the recipient of numerous awards, including Judge of the Year from the Hispanic Bar Association in 1994, the Business Section of the Orange County Bar Association in 1996, Consumer Attorneys of Orange County in 1996, the Family Law Section of the Orange County Bar Association in 2005, and Orange County Women Lawyers in 2007. He also received Statewide Judge of the Year from Consumer Attorneys of California in 2001 "in recognition of his untiring efforts and enlightened approach toward the improvement of the administration of justice."

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