

Press Release

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF INDIANA

Celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month with

Sylvia's Story: Mendez v. Westminster

Friday, October 11, 2019, 2:00 pm



INDIANAPOLIS, Indiana (August 19, 2019): In September 1943, a nine-year-old girl and her brothers attempted to enroll at the 17th Street School in Westminster, California. School officials told the family that, because of their Hispanic heritage and appearance, the children could not attend the local school and would instead have to enroll at the so-called “Mexican” school ten blocks away. The children’s parents, along with four other families, filed a federal lawsuit known as *Mendez v. Westminster*. In 1947, the case made its way to the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, which upheld a district court’s ruling that “segregation...in school districts fosters antagonisms in the children and suggests inferiority among them where none exists,” in violation of the 14th Amendment’s equal protection clause. *Mendez v. Westminster* led to a bill that ended school segregation in California and laid the groundwork for the United States Supreme Court’s 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

On Friday, October 11, 2019, at 2:00 pm in the William E. Steckler Ceremonial Courtroom, Sylvia Mendez, the girl whose parents fought for her to receive an equal education, will speak at the third annual Hispanic Heritage Month event at the Birch Bayh Federal Building and United States Courthouse, 46 East Ohio Street, Indianapolis, Indiana. Now 83, Ms. Mendez will share her recollections and reflections on the case and how her parents’ actions changed the course of her life. Having worked tirelessly to educate students across the country on the significance of *Mendez v. Westminster*, Ms. Mendez received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011 in recognition of her “message of tolerance and opportunity to children of all backgrounds and all walks of life.”



Joining Ms. Mendez will be Judge Jose Salinas of the Marion Superior Court. Judge Salinas will provide a legal analysis of *Mendez v. Westminster*. Ms. Mendez and Judge Salinas will answer questions from the audience; musical entertainment and refreshments will also be provided.

This event is sponsored by the United States District Court for the Southern District of Indiana and the Indiana State Bar Association’s Latino Affairs Committee and is pending one hour of Continuing Legal Education Credit. The program will last one hour. **Pre-registration IS required and available [by clicking here](#).** There is no cost to attend and the program is open to the public. Photography will be permitted during the program. If you would like to send a photographer and/or reporter to cover the program, or if you have other questions, please contact Doria Lynch at 317-229-3729 or Doria_lynch@insd.uscourts.gov.