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## Leynee Cruz on legal life between Miami and Chicago, her upcoming HLAI term

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Even in the practice of law, Chicago is a different place from Miami, the city Leynee A. Cruz hails from.

A large part of Cruz's practice in the Sunshine State involved Cuban immigrant clients who wanted to send money to relatives back on the island under communist rule. According to Cruz, that's a difficult task under the U.S. embargo.

Cruz moved to Chicago in 2014, initially joining the firm of Ruben M. Garcia & Associates. In July, the 32-year-old St. Thomas University School of Law graduate joined Chuhak & Tecson P.C. as an associate.

In a written Q&A with the Daily Law Bulletin, Cruz discussed her journey to Chicago and her upcoming term as the president of the Hispanic Lawyers Association of Illinois.

**CDLB:** Tell us how you went from wanting to be a social worker to a lawyer.

**Cruz:** During college I worked as a legal secretary for the Guardianship Program of Dade County Inc., which is Miami-Dade County's Public Guardian's Office. GDPC's legal department was the perfect marriage between two of my passions — social work and the law.

As I learned more about the legal aspects of adult guardianship, I believed that a legal career would allow me to further policy changes that impact individuals' lives, which is what I'd hoped to achieve as a social worker.

**CDLB:** What differences have you noticed between practicing law in Chicago versus practicing law in Miami?

**Cruz:** In Miami, the majority of people are Hispanic and Spanish-speaking, so I never thought of myself as a "minority." Having grown up in, finishing law school and establishing a legal practice in a city that is very different from Chicago has provided me with a broader view of community and the practice of law.

**CDLB:** Your area of law — trusts, estates, etc. — is heavily governed by state law. When you moved your practice from Florida to Illinois, what's one surprising difference you noticed about your field?

**Cruz:** In my area of the law there are many distinct differences between Florida and Illinois laws and practices. Among them:

- Illinois' estate tax! Florida does not have an estate tax.
- Unlike Illinois law, under Florida law, the beneficiary of a will can be a witness to the execution of a will from which they will inherit without affecting



Leynee A. Cruz

their beneficial legacy or validity of the will.

- Also, in Florida, "half-blood" siblings only inherit half as much as "whole-blood" siblings through intestate succession.

- In Miami-Dade County, the four "probate judges" hear all types of guardianship matters, mental health proceedings and decedent's estate and trust disputes. Here in Chicago, there are decedent's estate judges, adult guardianship judges, minor guardianship judges and the Chancery Division.

- The caps and rules on attorney's fees in Cook County guardianship were also shocking. In Miami, only the typical reasonable and necessary attorney's fees standard applies.

**CDLB:** You're going to become the president of the Hispanic Lawyers Association of

Illinois this year. What will be the theme of your presidency?

**Cruz:** Excellence and exposure. As president of the Hispanic Lawyers Association of Illinois, I will work to continue exposing the hard work, community involvement and legal acumen of our membership to the legal community and the community at large.

**CDLB:** What are your long-term goals for your legal career?

**Cruz:** To continue to grow my practice with Chuhak & Tecson while making a difference and being impactful within the legal and Hispanic communities. I want to do something that others can build from — bridge gaps, if you will — to make something better for my clients, their families and communities. What exactly will that will look like? Interview me again in a year or two.

**CDLB:** What is the first app you use on your smartphone when you wake up in the morning?

**Cruz:** I'd have to say it's a three-way tie between my personal e-mail app, my work e-mail app and the Weather Channel. I learned early on that you could never assume what the weather will be like on any given day in Chicago!

**CDLB:** What TV show did you just finish binge-watching?

**Cruz:** "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel."

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