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*Cynthia Figueroa is one of the 2022 AL DÍA Women of Merit honorees, in the nonprofit category.*

By: Jensen Toussaint, AL DÍA

If there is one thing that can be traced to Cynthia Figueroa's unbridled dedication to advocacy work, it's her personal multicultural Latino heritage.

Figueroa was born in Arecibo, Puerto Rico to a Honduran mother and Cuban-American father who met in Puerto Rico, both as members of the Peace Corps.

"So, the issue of social justice has been a critical part of my personal and professional career pathways and it's an important part of my identity," said Figueroa in an interview with AL DÍA.

Living within modest means, her father worked in construction before transitioning into teaching. Like so many others, Figueroa's parents made the journey to the U.S. — Miami, Florida — when she was five, for more opportunities and a chance at a better life.

Figueroa detailed that moving to the mainland presented an indelible experience for her personally.

"I probably wouldn't have been raised bilingual, I don't know if I would have gone to college, I don't know what the trajectory would have been," she reflected. "But certainly, that opportunity changed the pathway for my sisters and I."

The story of her mother moving to the U.S. at the age of 40, having to learn to speak English, and the sacrifices she made for her children stuck with Figueroa, and led her on the path she has taken in her career.

#### MAKING EQUITY AND ACCESS AVAILABLE TO ALL

Since moving to Philadelphia about 25 years ago, Figueroa has been actively involved in a number of prominent organizations.

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From roles as director and CEO of Congreso to more recently, Deputy Mayor at the Office of Children and Families, Figueroa's approach has been the same.

In her own words, "It's making sure that equity and access is available to all people," she said.

When she thinks about the opportunities she, her sisters and parents have had in this country, she wants to afford those opportunities to others, as well.

"I see that eroding in our society, particularly for low-income and middle income families," added Figueroa.

It is for that reason that she strives to be such an advocate and change agent for underserved, marginalized and vulnerable groups in each role she takes on.

"I have always worked really hard to stand on the side of right," she said. "Sometimes standing on the side of right can be very lonely, it can be very painful. But at the same time, it can be incredibly fulfilling."