



PROFILE

Miami Litigator Rises to President of Organization That Funded Her Law School Scholarship

"We have pride for the people who are still fighting for freedom," said Giselle Gutierrez, whose theme for the Cuban American Bar Association's 49th Annual Installation Gala is "Orgullo De Mi Tierra Bella," or "pride of my beautiful land."

Giselle Gutierrez, a shareholder at Stearns Weaver Miller in Miami who will officially become president of the Cuban American Bar Association on Saturday.

January 30, 2023 at 02:16 PM

🕒 5 minute read

Bar Associations



Michael A. Mora [↗](#)

What You Need to Know

- Giselle Gutierrez will officially become president of the Cuban American Bar Association at its annual installation on Saturday.
- The event is expected to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars that CABA will allocate to its independent legal services arm and its foundation.
- The theme of the Gala spotlights the unprecedented uprising in Cuba on July 11, 2021, and the subsequent government crackdown that continues to this day.

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As a Miami litigator eases into her new role as the Cuban American Bar Association president for 2023, she faces one of the first tests of her ascension: to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars at an annual Gala for a pro bono legal services arm and a foundation.

Giselle Gutierrez, a shareholder at Stearns Weaver Miller in Miami, said the theme for CABA's 49th Annual Installation Gala on Saturday at the JW Marriott Marquis is "Orgullo De Mi Tierra Bella." The theme spotlights the unprecedented uprising in Cuba on July 11, 2021, and the government crackdown that continues to this day.

"For the first time in about 60 years the people of Cuba had an organic uprising, and protests all over the country and that's just never been done," Gutierrez observed. "We have pride for the people who are still fighting for freedom. They're the ones standing up against oppression and potential persecution."

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Miriam Ramos of Holland & Knight. (Courtesy photo)

Miriam Ramos, the past president and former Coral Gables city attorney who joined Holland & Knight on Monday, said Gutierrez might have to deal with a partisan spotlight while she carries out some of CABA's public outreach.

Meanwhile, more than 1,200 attorneys, judges and influential business and community leaders with "Cuban Time" tickets will celebrate at the event after Gutierrez is sworn in as president.



Event

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"More and more Cubans are coming here each day, so there may be some areas there that she'll have to deal with for CABA as a political organization," Ramos said. "When we weigh in on some of these issues, it's always from the vantage point of human rights,

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and not the politics vantage point. But that's a hard line to draw. She'll have to grapple with that during her year."

'The Only Hispanic Woman in My Classes'

Lawyers of Cuban descent founded CABA, a nonprofit voluntary bar association, nearly 50 years ago when law firms in South Florida sought bilingual attorneys. However, Cuban attorneys lacked a community to rely on, similar to what Gutierrez felt when she pursued her doctorate of jurisprudence at Pennsylvania State University.

"It was a complete cultural shock," Gutierrez recalled, referring to her time at Penn State Law. "I was the only Hispanic woman in my classes and never experienced anything like that. I knew I wanted to be and work in Florida."

Gutierrez transferred to and thrived at the University of Florida College of Law. While there, she earned a CABA scholarship for a portion of her law school tuition and received invaluable mentorship from its members. U.S. District Senior [Judge Marcia G. Cooke](#), who passed away on Friday, was also a mentor for Gutierrez following her judicial internship at the federal court.

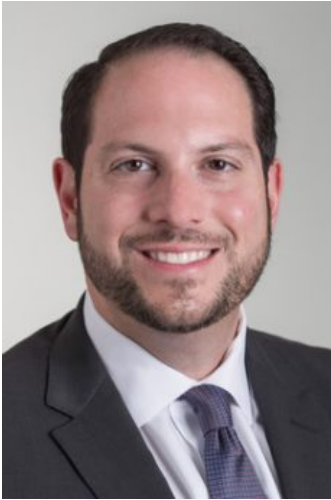
"I had the privilege of having her swear me in to the Florida Bar alongside my mom—a memory I will cherish forever," Gutierrez said on Monday. "I'm grateful for her mentorship of minority women. She was an exceptional judge and trailblazer."

And following graduation, Gutierrez clerked for U.S. District Judge Paul C. Huck of the Southern District of Florida, before becoming an associate at Stearns Weaver.

Over the next eight years, Gutierrez devoted time to multiple bar associations and boards, including CABA, and became a shareholder at the law firm. Suddenly, the wave of demonstrations began in Havana and more than 15 other Cuban cities over the dictatorship, deteriorating living conditions and the lack of basic goods and services on the island.

Human Rights Watch, an international non-governmental organization, shared videos by Cubans documenting the police beatings and arrests of protesters. [The Wall Street Journal](#) reported summary trials and the sentencing of demonstrators behind closed doors with defendants lacking legal counsel.

Dax Bello, a shareholder at Stewart Tilghman Fox Bianchi & Cain in Miami who was [the CABA president](#) when the demonstrations



A. Dax Bello, a partner at Stewart Tilghman Fox Bianchi & Cain. (Courtesy photo)

started, said Gutierrez will face one of the similar challenges from years past: “An increasing desensitization of atrocious behavior.”

As the South Florida community evolves into one of the world’s “most beautiful melting pots,” Dax said it is easy to overlook that the reasons people emigrate from their native countries are “not equal.” Dax explained that the U.S. government “lumps Cubans risking life, limb and prosecution to escape a totalitarian regime—one which controls virtually every major decision of their lives—into the same category as immigrants who do not face those same threats.”

“It has almost become popular to ignore the constant denials of the most basic human rights happening so close to our shores,” Dax said. “That messaging makes CABA’s human rights advocacy much harder. People simply don’t realize how bad it really is in Cuba, making it easier for them to ignore the problem.”

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