

# Celebrating Zenaida Mendez: A Women's Rights Trailblazer

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As we celebrate Women's History Month this March, it's only fitting to shine a spotlight on the remarkable journey and achievements of Zenaida Mendez, a beacon of courage, compassion, and change in the fight for gender equality. I take pride in reflecting on the extraordinary legacy of my mom, **Zenaida Mendez**, who is set to receive the prestigious West Harlem Environmental Action #WEACT Women's History Month Award on March 9, 2024.

Zenaida Mendez's impact transcends accolades and awards; it resonates deeply within the vibrant tapestry of New York City and far beyond. Born of Dominican heritage, she has not only broken barriers and shattered stereotypes as the first Dominican-American Woman to chair the Steering Committee on the local Manhattan Community Board 4 in Hell's Kitchen. Her tenure as chair exemplified her unwavering commitment to amplifying the voices of marginalized communities and effecting tangible change at the grassroots level by organizing tenants during the 80's urban renewal conversion of NYC neighborhoods.

In addition to her groundbreaking local leadership, Zenaida has left an indelible mark on the broader landscape of women's rights advocacy. As the first Dominican Woman to serve on the inaugural Bias Crime Taskforce at the NYC Commission of Human Rights during Mayor David Dinkins' administration, she pioneered efforts to combat discrimination and promote inclusivity in the fabric of our society.

Zenaida's visionary leadership extends beyond borders in 2000, as the Founder and Board President of the National Dominican Women's Caucus (**NDWC**), where she has galvanized Latinas and Women of Dominican descent to advocate for gender equity and social justice. Her dedication to intersectional feminism is further evidenced by her role as the First Director of the Racial Diversity Program at the National Organization for Women (NOW)

and as the First Woman of Color to serve as President of the New York State Chapter of NOW.

In recognition of her outstanding contributions to cultural diversity and community empowerment, Zenaida was honored in 2022 with the renowned Jewell Ryan-White Award for Cultural Diversity by the **National Alliance for Community Media in 2022**. Her impact reverberates in community media, where for the past 18 years, Zenaida has been at Manhattan Neighborhood Network (**MNN.org**). Zenaida is currently the Director of Manhattan Neighborhood Network at *El Barrio Firehouse* and as an executive producer, uplifting the narratives of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and LGBTQAI+ individuals while amplifying the voices of marginalized communities.

As her eldest daughter and now a mother myself, I have witnessed first-hand the transformative power of Zenaida's courageous and compassionate leadership. Her unwavering dedication to justice and equality serves as an inspiration not only to me, and her grandchildren but to countless others striving to create a more equitable world.

I invite you to follow Zenaida Mendez on LinkedIn, Twitter now X, Instagram, and Facebook to stay updated on her tireless advocacy efforts and join us for the 2nd Annual #NDWC **National Latina Leaders Summit, on March 22nd and March 23rd** at John Jay College of Criminal Justice [RSVP **Event Bright**]. Let us come together to celebrate the courageous, compassionate leadership of Women like my mom, **Zenaida Mendez, who continues to shape history and inspire future generations.**