Luz Maria Frias has been named the director of Saint Paul's newly merged Human Rights and Equal Economic Opportunity (HREEO) department. Following a nationwide search, Frias' appointment came after an extensive process that included applicant interviews and evaluations by the community and a 13-member selection committee.

"Thanks to the commitment and hard work of a wide variety of individuals and organizations over the past year, we now have the right plan in place and the right person to move this department forward," Saint Paul Mayor Chris Coleman said. "I have full confidence in Luz Maria Frias' leadership. Her capability, dedication, and integrity will enable us to further our mission and achieve our goals of increasing economic opportunity for all."

"The formation of the HREEO department presents us with distinct opportunities to achieve economic inclusion in a more integrated fashion and on a larger scale," said Luz Maria Frias. "I am excited for this new opportunity to work with talented staff and community members to achieve our shared vision."

As the new HREEO director, Frias will be introduced to the community at a meeting on March 3 from 5 - 6 p.m. at Oxford Community Center, 270 Lexington Pkwy North.

Recently recognized by Minnesota Lawyer as a 2008 Attorney of the Year, Frias holds both a master's and law degree from the University of Iowa. In addition to working in the Minnesota House of Representatives, Frias' previous experience includes that as chief legal officer of Centro Legal, family court magistrate in the Second and Fourth Judicial Districts, and hearing examiner for the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community.

"Throughout the selection process, the desire among community members to find a talented candidate truly committed to their needs has remained consistent," said Councilmember Melvin Carter. "Luz brings a long history of dedication to equity and access, as well as the skills necessary to lead this vital department into the future. This has been a long public process--from the Hall audit until now. I am confident that we found the right person for the job."

Frias brings more than 10 years of experience in management, program development,

fundraising, and leadership training. A noted civil rights advocate for over 20 years, Frias has extensive experience as a mediator and frequent lecturer on social justice issues; diversity issues within the courts and mediation process; cross-cultural negotiation issues; immigration public policy reform; and the use of interpreters within the legal system. Most recently, Frias served as Saint Paul's external affairs director where she secured more than $27 million in supplemental funding to spearhead the City's major initiatives.

By merging functions across the City, the new HREEO department brings civil rights enforcement; contract analysis and procurement; contract monitoring, investigation, and enforcement; and capacity building and workforce development under one roof. Having one department with a central mission will increase accountability, improve access, and ensure equal opportunity for all of Saint Paul.

In addition to the Mayor, the Human Rights and Equal Economic Opportunity Commission will provide some performance oversight of the department. The commission, a 21-member board of representatives from a variety of sectors of the community, currently has 10 openings and residents are encouraged to apply.