

Report on Patient Privacy Volume 22, Number 10. October 06, 2022 Acting OCR Director Named to the Post Permanently, Has Many Tasks to Complete

By Theresa Defino

HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra has made it official: Melanie Fontes Rainer, his former advisor in California and more recently in Washington, D.C., is now the permanent director of the Office for Civil Rights (OCR). On Sept. 14, HHS announced that Becerra had sworn in Fontes Rainer as director that day and said she was “appointed to the role last month.”^[1]

Becerra and Fontes Rainer have a history dating back to his time as attorney general of California. Fontes Rainer was Becerra’s senior advisor for health care for approximately four-and-a-half years before becoming what HHS called a “counselor” in May 2021.

Fontes Rainer was first appointed acting director in July—a move that was a surprise. News of the change was first reported in mid-July by *Politico*, citing anonymous sources. After much prodding, HHS officials acknowledged that Lisa Pino, who was appointed director in September 2021, had departed the agency.^[2]

In the announcement, Becerra said Fontes Rainer “devoted her entire professional career to public service and has worked tirelessly to ensure that health care is accessible, affordable, and available to all, no matter where you live or who you are. As one of my longtime senior aides, I can say with certainty that Melanie will vigorously protect and enforce the healthcare and civil rights of Americans across the country. Melanie’s commitment and expertise are vital to implementing the health and human services priorities of the Biden-Harris Administration as we work to ensure families across the country know that we have their back.”

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