

2022 ABF Fellows Outstanding Service Award



Hon. Vanessa Ruiz

District of Columbia Court of Appeals

Vanessa Ruiz is a Senior Judge of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals, the highest court of the District of Columbia, Washington DC. She was appointed to the court in 1994 after nomination by the President of the United States and confirmation by the Senate of the United States. She is the longest-serving woman on the court and the first (and only) Hispanic appointed to the D.C. Court of Appeals and as chief legal officer for the District of Columbia.

She has been a leader in judicial ethics and access to justice initiatives. She chaired the D.C. Courts' Advisory Committee on Judicial Conduct, is a judicial member of the District of Columbia Access to Justice Commission and a recognized national voice for enhancing access to justice for those who are unrepresented, immigrants, and language minorities.

Judge Ruiz participates in a number of local, national and international organizations. She is the Immediate Past President of the International Association of Women Judges, former Chair of its Board of Managerial Trustees and a Past President of the U.S. National Association of Women Judges. She led the American Bar Association to adopt Standards for Language Access in Courts. She was the first judicial member of the D.C. Bar's Pro Bono Committee, a member of the Board of the Council for Court Excellence and the Judicial Council of the D.C. Hispanic Bar Association. Judge Ruiz is a member of the American Law Institute and is a Life Fellow of the American Bar Foundation. She served as Trustee of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Judge Ruiz speaks, at home and abroad, on issues essential to the judiciary: judicial independence and integrity, access to justice, and the necessary interface with the inclusion of women and minorities in the judiciary, equality and a gender perspective. She emphasizes civil society initiatives to improve and strengthen the judiciary, including the importance of citizen understanding of the courts and judges' participation in civic education in a democratic society. She serves as mentor to students, lawyers, and judges.

Upon graduation from law school, Judge Ruiz practiced law working on international, commercial, and intellectual property transactions and arbitration. Five years out of law school, she successfully briefed and argued an important civil rights case before the U.S. Supreme Court that established the standing of certain nonprofit organizations. After fifteen years in private practice, she turned to public service, and became the Corporation Counsel (now Attorney General) for the District of Columbia.

Judge Ruiz has received numerous awards. Among them: Judge of the Year from the Hispanic National Bar Association; Lifetime Achievement Award from the Hispanic Bar Association of D.C.; Latina Leader in Law Award from the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute; the first Vaino Spencer Leadership Award of the National Association of Women Judges; Lifetime Achievement Award for Excellence in Legal Service from MALDEF; Woman Lawyer of the Year by the D.C. Women's Bar Association. Judge Ruiz was honored with the Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award by the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession. She received an honorary doctorate from the Washington College of Law, American University.

Judge Ruiz has taught as an adjunct professor at Georgetown University Law Center and ESADE Law School in Barcelona. She is co-author of *Europe Without Frontiers: A Lawyer's Guide* (BNA 1989).

Judge Ruiz was born and grew up in San Juan, Puerto Rico. She graduated from Wellesley College in 1972 with a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy and received her law degree from Georgetown University Law Center in 1975. She is married to former ambassador David E. Birenbaum.