November 2, 2020

Antonio Calcado  
Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer  
Chair, University Naming Committee  
Rutgers University  
33 Knightsbridge Road  
Piscataway, NJ 08854

Dear Tony,

It is with great enthusiasm and a groundswell of support from the Rutgers University – Newark community, as well as members of the New Jersey State Legislature, that I write to propose naming our residential facility at 15 Washington Street, which once was home to Rutgers Law School, Newark, for the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

As is now very well-known not only across Rutgers, but nationally, Justice Ginsburg taught at Rutgers Law School from 1963 to 1972. Biographers, former colleagues and students, and Justice Ginsburg, herself, have noted that this period was an inflection point in her career. Legal scholars also have cited it as an inflection point in the history of jurisprudence, noting that Ginsburg was both pioneering the teaching of women’s rights in law school—for which she explicitly shared credit with her law students of the time in a seminar she developed and taught on the topic—and blazing the trail forward in the courts to assure those rights. During her tenure at Rutgers, in addition to being a highly popular professor, she was the inaugural advisor to the Women’s Rights Law Reporter, the first law journal in the United States focused on issues of gender equality and justice and which had been established by law students. Ginsburg explicitly connected the mutuality of these relationships she had with students when in 2016 she spoke to the importance of Rutgers to her on the occasion of the university’s 250th Anniversary: “Rutgers students sparked my interest and aided in charting the course I then pursued…Less than three years after starting the seminar, I was arguing gender discrimination cases before the Supreme Court.” The New York Times editorial board contextualized her accomplishments as a champion for women’s rights when upon her passing it wrote:

“Justice Ginsburg, the second woman ever to be appointed to the Supreme Court, paved the way for women’s equality before the law, and for women’s rights to be taken seriously by the courts and by society.”

Ginsburg remained connected to Rutgers throughout her life after leaving the university, maintaining close contacts with faculty colleagues and students whom she had taught and mentored. On the occasion of the dedication of the Center for Law and Justice in September 1999 as the new home for the Law School, Ginsburg returned to give the keynote address, during the course of which she identified herself with the school’s longstanding tradition of scholarship, teaching, and advocacy aimed at assuring the rights of all people, especially groups subject to
discrimination such as women and members of ethnic/racial minorities. Reporting on her remarks that day, the Star-Ledger wrote that she “praised Rutgers for promoting diversity and sticking with affirmative action and its minority student programs.” Indeed, Ginsburg pointed out in reference to the law school’s Minority Student Program (which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2018), “I am pleased to say I had a hand in developing that program when I served on the Rutgers faculty.”

After her passing in September 2020 after recurring battles with cancer, Ginsburg became the first woman and first Jewish American to have the honor of lying in state in the U.S. Capitol. Her loss was met with a torrent of grief, but also of admiration and fond recollections.

**Former President Barack Obama wrote:**

“…for nearly three decades, as the second woman ever to sit on the highest court in the land, she was a warrior for gender equality — someone who believed that equal justice under law only had meaning if it applied to every single American…Over a long career on both sides of the bench — as a relentless litigator and an incisive jurist — Justice Ginsburg helped us see that discrimination on the basis of sex isn’t about an abstract ideal of equality; that it doesn’t only harm women; that it has real consequences for all of us. It’s about who we are — and who we can be.”

**Former President Bill Clinton wrote:**

“We have lost one of the most extraordinary justices ever to serve on the Supreme Court. Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s life and landmark opinions moved us closer to a more perfect union. And her powerful dissents reminded us that we walk away from our Constitution’s promise at our peril.”

Chief Justice of the Supreme Court John G. Roberts Jr., said in a statement released by the court:

“Our nation has lost a jurist of historic stature. We at the Supreme Court have lost a cherished colleague. Today we mourn but with confidence that future generations will remember Ruth Bader Ginsburg as we knew her — a tireless and resolute champion of justice.”

Elizabeth Langer ’73 (First editor-in-chief of the Women’s Law Reporter) remembered Ginsburg as a “taskmaster.” Still, she recalls, “She gave us credibility. Gave us legitimacy. Defended us to faculty members who thought this was ridiculous. And she shepherded us through, along with a lot of enthusiastic law students. Mostly women.”

George Conk ’73 (“Remembering Ruth Ginsburg,” Otherwise: Commentary on Lawyering, Language, and Politics) wrote:

“I remember being in Ruth's civil procedure class, where she stood at the desk with her purse and her papers. She had not yet argued a case in court. Neal Katyal just called her the Thurgood Marshall of women's rights. Truer words...Though she was a novice Ruth laid out her strategy - to make gender distinctions in the law a "suspect classification" which, like race, was to be viewed skeptically by reviewing courts.”
Rutgers Law School, Camden Co-Dean Kim Mutcherson wrote:
“There are few lawyers who can say that their work impacted the law in the way that Justice Ginsburg’s long campaign against gender discrimination did…As we remember this remarkable woman, let’s all find our own way to dissent from the majority to make space for the marginalized, trampled, and disempowered. The role frequently will not bear fruit in the present, but it sets the stage for the future. Gender discrimination is not a relic of the past, but the road to that end was paved by women (and men) who, like Justice Ginsburg, knew that law is as powerful a tool of uplift as it is a tool of oppression.”

Rutgers Law School, Newark Co-Dean David Lopez wrote:
“She will be remembered as a legal giant: a Justice on the United States Supreme Court, a judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, a trailblazing litigator for equal rights and justice, and a law professor at Columbia and, of course, here at Rutgers Law School in Newark…Justice Ginsburg pushed our nation forward to live its finest. She made this country better. Her tenacity, intelligence, and empathy for the voiceless inspired so many in this nation, including so many of us to become attorneys. Everyone in our law school community stands on her shoulders!”

If this were any era at all, there would be more than enough of a record of accomplishments that burnish Rutgers’ reputation and serve the public good in lasting, even singular, ways to justify the highest consideration for naming a Rutgers building for Justice Ginsburg. However, in an era when our nation is experiencing an unprecedented surge in awareness of who among us continue to be left behind in so many domains of public and private life and how far we have to go to achieve our nation’s promise of genuinely equal justice under the law, the case for naming a building for Ginsburg is more than strikingly appropriate. It is urgent. As Ginsburg wrote in an op-ed for The New York Times in 2016 titled, “Advice for the Living”:

“Earlier, I spoke of great changes I have seen in women’s occupations. Yet one must acknowledge the still bleak part of the picture. Most people in poverty in the United States and the world over are women and children, women’s earnings here and abroad trail the earnings of men with comparable education and experience, our workplaces do not adequately accommodate the demands of childbearing and child rearing, and we have yet to devise effective ways to ward off sexual harassment at work and domestic violence in our homes. I am optimistic, however, that movement toward enlistment of the talent of all who compose ‘We, the people,’ will continue.”

With characteristic clarity of vision, determination, and hope, these words of inspiration point toward the particular propriety of naming a building for Justice Ginsburg that reflects her focus on future generations. An ideal building to our minds at Rutgers-Newark would be 15 Washington Street. Besides having been the home of the law school from 1975 through 1999, it is now, as a residential facility housing upwards of 330 undergraduate and graduate students, including many law students. It is, thus, a home to students who represent precisely the breathtaking diversity of people whom we, as a nation, need to realize their full potential—a realization dependent in no small part upon making good on America’s promise of equal justice under the law.
To honor Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s legacy at Rutgers, as well as to our nation, I urge the University Naming Committee to approve this request and advance this proposal to the Board of Governors for consideration.

Cordially,

Nancy Cantor
Chancellor