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Law School News: RWU Law Alumnae Will Address Ginsburg Legacy, Workplace Gender Equity 03-11-2021

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March 11, 2021

Law School News

RWU Law Alumnae Will Address Ginsburg Legacy, Workplace Gender Equity

The Honorable Elizabeth Ortiz '10 of the R.I. Family Court, and Alyse Antone Smith '18 of the R.I. Attorney General's Office, will discuss RBG's indelible imprint on issues of gender equity in the workplace.

March 11, 2021



The Honorable Elizabeth Ortiz '10.

In celebration of Women's History Month, Roger Williams University presents a keynote and panel discussion on the legacy of late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, featuring two accomplished alumnae of RWU Law.

On Friday, March 12, 2021 at 12:00 p.m. EST, the RWU community is invited to "Honoring the Life and Impact of Ruth Bader Ginsburg," a conversation featuring the Honorable Elizabeth Ortiz '10, an associate justice of the Rhode Island Family Court. (Click [here](#) to attend.)

Governor Gina Raimondo nominated Ortiz – a “double Hawk,” who also earned her undergraduate degree at RWU in 2007 – to the lifetime seat last December, making her the first Latina ever nominated to the court that oversees the state's child custody, divorce, and juvenile matters. She fills the seat left open by the retirement of Judge John E. McCann III.

Judge Ortiz's keynote will be followed by a panel discussion featuring another RWU Law graduate, **Alyse Antone Smith '18**, a Special Assistant Attorney General with the Criminal Division of the Rhode Island Attorney General's Office. Smith is based in the AG's Newport office.

The panel, which features five alumnae of RWU's Legal Studies program – from which Smith graduated in 2014 – will focus on gender equity in the workplace, work/life balance, and the importance of mentorship.

In her remarks on Justice Ginsburg, Judge Ortiz will discuss the challenges faced by women and people of color in the judiciary and the practice of law, as well as the work that is being done to dismantle barriers across the state.

“Ruth Bader Ginsburg is a hero to people like myself [in law practice and the judiciary], and to women in general, because of everything she did for women,” Ortiz said in an interview about the upcoming event. “Ginsburg and pioneers like her make the judiciary and legal world more aware that issues of representation and communication are still happening. I’m very cognizant of that now in my role as a judge; I make sure I do everything I can to bring more awareness to the communication and representation issues, and the cultural issues and the way they affect parenting and the way people look at families.

“What I want people to take away from my talk is awareness of these issues and that they still need to be addressed, but also hope – hope for the legal community, hope for litigants,” Ortiz added. “Governor Raimondo did an amazing job of doing something that was long overdue – diversifying the judiciary. I was happy to see that, but hope it doesn’t end there.”

An active advocate for diversifying the state’s bench and bar, Ortiz is a founding member of the R.I. Hispanic Bar Association and former member of the R.I. Bar Diversity Task Force. She received her bachelor of paralegal studies through the Providence campus and her juris doctor at RWU Law, while also juggling the challenges of being a working mom. Prior to her Family Court judgeship, she was a sole legal practitioner with offices in North Providence and Pawtucket and served as in-house counsel to Sakonnet Capital Partners, LLC.

The keynote address will be followed by a question-and-answer session with Judge Ortiz and breakout room discussions where attendees can discuss the ideas and issues presented in the conversation. The event is sponsored by the RWU Women’s Affinity Group.

At 1 p.m. EST, following the keynote address and breakout sessions, the community is also invited to attend a panel discussion of alumnae from the legal studies program. (Click [here](#) to attend.) Join the conversation of a diverse group of distinguished legal studies graduates who will discuss gender equity in the workplace, work/life balance, and the importance of

mentorship, and offer advice to students interested in careers in the law or in social justice.
Panelists include:

- **Alyse Antone Smith, Esq. '14, L '18**
Special Assistant Attorney General (Criminal Division), Rhode Island Attorney General's Office; Newport, Rhode Island
- **Alyssa M. Kelly, Esq. '15, Legal Studies and Psychology**
Associate Attorney at Atwood & Cherny, P.C. (Family Law); Boston, Massachusetts
- **Nikki Marie Oliveira, Esq. '07, Legal Studies and Math**
Senior Associate, Nutter (Estate Planning, Tax and Elder Law); Boston, Massachusetts
- **Jasmine Lopez Calderon '07, Legal Studies and Spanish**
Senior Account Manager (Community Organizing, Fundraising, Marketing), Archipelago Strategies Group (ASG); Boston, Massachusetts
- **Ellen Messali, Esq. '07, Legal Studies and Political Science**
Staff Attorney, New Haven Legal Assistance Association (Immigration Law); New Haven, Connecticut

Please join us for an afternoon of conversation about the legacies and careers of groundbreaking women in the legal and judicial system. The events are open to all.