



Judge Vanessa Ruiz was appointed to the District of Columbia Court of Appeals, the highest court of the District of Columbia, in 1994, by President Clinton after confirmation by the U.S. Senate.

Judge Ruiz was born and raised 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. Upon graduation from law school, Judge Ruiz practiced law at Fried Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson in Washington, D.C., where she worked on international commercial and intellectual property transactions and arbitration. When just five years out of law school, she successfully briefed and argued an important civil rights case before the U.S. Supreme Court. She broadened her private practice, and became in-house Senior Counsel at Sears World Trade, Inc., an international trading company, that involved her in many aspects of international business organizations and transactions. Judge Ruiz was a founding member of Sloan, Lehner & Ruiz, a firm specializing in litigation and international matters, which later merged into the firm of Pepper, Hamilton & Scheetz, where she became partner. After deciding to devote her career to public service, in 1991, Judge Ruiz joined the Office of Corporation Counsel for the District of Columbia (now Office of the D.C. Attorney General) as Deputy in charge of the Legal Counsel Division, rising to Principal Deputy in 1993, and Corporation Counsel in 1994. From there, she was appointed to the court.

Judge Ruiz chairs the D.C. Courts' Advisory Committee on Judicial Conduct and is a member of the District of Columbia Access to Justice Commission. Judge Ruiz participates in a number of local, national and international legal organizations. She is a Past President of the National Association of Women Judges and serves on the Board of Managerial Trustees of the International Association of Women Judges. Judge Ruiz is a member of the Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defendants of the American Bar Association and chairs the ABA project to develop national standards for language access in the courts. She has been an active member of the D.C. Bar's Pro Bono Program Committee, the Council for Court Excellence and the Hispanic Bar Association of the District of Columbia. Judge Ruiz is a member of the American Law Institute and is on the Board of Trustees of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Judge Ruiz speaks, at home and abroad, on issues of judicial independence and on 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 has served as mentor to students, lawyers and judges.

Judge Ruiz has received numerous awards. In 2001, she was named "Judge of the Year" by the Hispanic National Bar Association; in 2006, she received the Latina Leader in Law Award from the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute. She was awarded the first Vaino Spencer Leadership Award by the National Association of Women Judges in 2008. Judge Ruiz has received a Lifetime Achievement Award and recognized as a "Latina Leader" by the Hispanic Bar Association of D.C. In 2009 Judge Ruiz was honored with the Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award of the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession. Judge Ruiz received the 2022 Lady Justice Award for Humanitarian Aid from the National Association of Women Judges.

Judge Ruiz is co-author of *Europe Without Frontiers: A Lawyer's Guide*, and has taught as an adjunct professor at Georgetown University Law Center. Judge Ruiz is married to David E. Birenbaum. They have four children and three grandchildren.