

December 1, 2020

Pinellas County Board of Commissioners
315 Court Street
Clearwater, FL 33756

12-03-20 P05:41 IN

VIA U.S. MAIL

Dear Commissioners,

Please join the Fred G. Minnis, Sr. Bar Association and friends in honoring the life, legacy and impact of Attorney Fred G. Minnis, Sr. (“Mr. Minnis”) by naming a Pinellas County Courthouse or the Pinellas County Law Library in his honor. Mr. Minnis is deserving of this honor because of his lifetime of service to the legal profession, to the community and to the pursuit of justice of all.

Born in 1908, Fred Gillam Minnis, Sr. was an immigrant from the Bahamas who was adopted by the Gillam family. A true trailblazer, in 1925, he helped raise funds for supplies to start the first high school for black students in Miami, Booker T. Washington High School. He graduated with honors from Booker T. Washington and later obtained his bachelor’s degree in Political Science from Howard University. After college, Mr. Minnis served his country as a member of the United States Air Force and provided logistics to the Tuskegee Airmen. After his service, he obtained a master’s degree and law degree from Howard University.

His career was extraordinary. In 1951, Mr. Minnis was quietly sworn into the Florida Bar in Bradenton as news reporters were afraid to cover Minnis as the first black lawyer in the area. He was the only black researcher for the New Deal Agency that formed the Social Security Act and also served as a Legal Adviser to the War Claims Commission. He was admitted to practice in the Court of Military Appeal, United States Tax Court, and the United States Supreme Court.

Mr. Minnis credited Lou Brown, Sr. and Enoch Davis, pastor of Bethel Community Baptist church for persuading him to begin his practice in St. Petersburg in 1956. With his law practice located at 624 22nd Street, Minnis became the first black lawyer to establish a full-time practice in Pinellas County. Mr. Minnis is affectionately referred to as the “grandfather” of black lawyers in Pinellas County. He paved the way and provided opportunities to a generation of lawyers through clerkships and mentorships. Minnis’ associates included Ike W. Williams, followed by Morris Milton, Frank Peterman and Judge James Sanderlin.

Mr. Minnis was a legal pioneer who fought for the rights of African Americans and advocated that all people be treated with fairness, dignity and respect.



Minnis and his associates handled many of the civil rights cases including representing students arrested for sit-ins, representing sanitation workers in their labor strikes, and arguing the case that integrated county-operated golf courses. He represented the NAACP and NAACP Youth Council in many legal actions throughout the 1950's and 1960s.

A community activist and champion for equal opportunities in education, Mr. Minnis is credited with sending more than 500 students to Howard University, his alma mater. He taught at Florida A & M University, the University of South Florida, the University of Tampa and Eckerd College. He actively served his community as a member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.

Mr. Minnis was a proud husband to Frankie, who served as a principal at Bay Pointe Middle School and father to Charles and Fred Jr. In 1991, Minnis was buried in the historic Arlington National Cemetery. Even though he is no longer with us, his legacy lives through the Fred G. Minnis, Sr. Bar Association founded in 2000.

Fred G. Minnis, Sr. is deserving of having a courthouse or law library named in his honor to commemorate this rich history in Pinellas County. Due to his leadership and mentorship, generations of black lawyers and judges have practiced in Pinellas County. Though we all still strive for equality in the law, due to his sacrifice and persistence, "justice for all" became a reality within reach.

We write, therefore, as representatives of the generations of attorneys who have learned and benefited from Mr. Minnis' legacy. Naming a courthouse or law library in Mr. Minnis honor affirms the history of our past and guides us to build a better present and future for every citizen of Pinellas County.

If there are any questions, please email us info@minnisbar.com.

Sincerely,

2020-2021 Executive Board of the Fred G. Minnis, Sr. Bar Association

cc: Barry A. Burton, Pinellas County Administrator
Andrew Pupke, Director of Facilities and Real Property Division

Organizations and Individuals in support of this letter:

Senator Daryl Rouson
Florida State Senate, District 19

State Representative Michele Rayner-Goolsby
Florida House of Representatives, District 70



State Representative Ben Diamond
Florida House of Representatives, District 68

The Honorable Sean Shaw

Stetson University College of Law

The George Edgecomb Bar Association

St. Petersburg Bar Association

Pinellas Chapter of Florida Association of
Women Lawyers

Clearwater Bar Association

Pinellas Latin Bar Association

Pinellas Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers

Delta Omicron Sigma Chapter of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.

National Pan-Hellenic Council Pinellas County

St. Petersburg Alumni Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.

St. Petersburg Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

Zeta Upsilon Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

Bridgette Domingos, Esq. (Past President)

Zackary Zuroweste, Esq.

Sandra Diamond, Esq.

Jeannine Williams, Esq. (Past President)

Deborah Bushnell, Esq.

