

FSU Faculty Senate Resolution on Renaming B.K. Roberts Hall

The FSU Faculty Senate supports outstanding University efforts and the College of Law's current campaign to remove from its main classroom building the name of B.K. Roberts, a man who steadfastly resisted the racial integration of Florida's public law schools as Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme Court. We affirm the unanimously shared hope of law school faculty that their building be renamed to reflect our shared values of justice, equality, respect, compassion, and advocacy.

In 2018, the President's Advisory Panel concluded that although Chief Justice Roberts had been instrumental in the creation of the College of Law, the university community is not well-served by so honoring a segregationist who openly defied the United States Supreme Court's application of core constitutional principles. However, because the law building was named by an act of the legislature, legislative action is required to change it. In 2019, following request by the President of the University, the Dean of the Law School, and vast numbers of interested students, alumni, faculty, and staff, the Florida Senate passed a bill that would enable the University to change the name—but the House of Representatives failed to act.

The irredeemable contradiction between the name of the Law School's main building and the principles for which it stands can no longer be justified. On June 12, 2020, nearly every member of the Law School's faculty and administration formally called on the House of Representatives to complete the outstanding legislative process that will allow the name of the building to be changed. In this statement, we hereby join in their petition that the House of Representatives partner with the Senate in enacting the needed legislation without delay. As the law school faculty and administrators declared in their letter to the Speaker of the House,

“It is shameful that our main building continues to bear the name of B.K. Roberts. That the building that houses most of our faculty offices and classrooms carries the name of someone who persistently resisted the racial integration of Florida's public law schools is deeply painful and offensive. As a Florida Supreme Court justice, Roberts openly defied the U.S. Supreme Court in his quest to maintain segregation. The battle for racial integration was waged during a gruesome time in our country's history. B.K. Roberts was vehemently and unmistakably on the wrong side of that battle. The time has long since come to stop celebrating segregationists. ... As faculty and administrators, it is our moral responsibility to advocate for our students and our community.”

We share in that moral responsibility, and we echo their demand for decisive action.