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Plantation, Florida 33322

April 5, 2018

Honorable Justin Wilson, Mayor,
and Members of the City Council
City Hall
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Re: 619 South Lee Street
Appeal of BAR nos. 2018-00410 and 2018-00411

Dear Mr. Mayor and Council Members:

I write as the biographer of Justice Hugo L. Black who resided at 619 South Lee Street from 1939 to 1971. My book, *Hugo Black: A Biography*, published in 1994, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. I also started the efforts to have Congress recognize his centennial in 1986, which it did with a bill designating Hugo Black Day, and to have a stamp issued in his honor at that time, which it was with a formal ceremony at the Supreme Court of the United States. My friendship with the Black family started in 1970 when I spent a day with him at the house. It continued after his death in September 1971 when I spent many pleasurable hours there with his widow Elizabeth and his family until she moved in the summer of 1973, and it endures unabated to this day.

Alexandria has had, of course, many notable residents over the centuries. George Washington, George Mason, who provided the basis for the Bill of Rights, and Gerald R. Ford are probably the most significant. It is only stating the obvious that Justice Black belongs in this grouping. He was by any standard one of the handful of most influential justices in American history. His results filled the sky. We live by them today. American law, especially the First Amendment but also the rest of the Bill of Rights, would look very different today were it not for Justice Black. That by itself is reason to preserve his home and property in its original state and as established by law. If 619 South Lee were not the Black House, it would simply be another distinguished-looking home in Old Town, worthy of preservation for many reasons to be sure, but nothing unusually noteworthy otherwise. But as the Black House, it should be preserved as fully as are the homes of the three noted above.

To anyone who knew the Judge (as he preferred to be called) on the Supreme Court, the house and the man were interrelated. Both were formally informal, with an innate dignity. Originally, until his wife put her foot down, he wanted to buy more adjoining plots so that he would own the entire southern part of the block. He spent at least a quarter of his life at his desk in the study, reading or writing. Most of his opinions were written there, and clerks often went over drafts with him word by word until midnight.

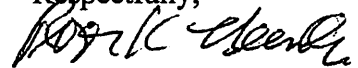
Another goodly slice of time Justice Black spent on the tennis court, which would be destroyed under the current proposal. It often seemed as important as the other, palatial one on which he served. Bad days on the one behind the house were called "tennis the menace" days. He rolled it regularly as he daily watered the garden which he always felt was the centerpiece of the property. He did everything possible to preserve the home and property, to keep them in

their original condition, updated if and when necessary, always keeping their essence intact. This included obtaining the easement involved in this matter. That was his preference, and as such it should be followed.

Many dignitaries came over the house, some to play tennis. The Blacks entertained Lyndon Johnson three times, as senator, Vice President and President. President Truman came over as senator (to discuss, alas, Senate business) and as president when the Justice, knowing he would be upset after the Court ruled against him in the Steel Seizure case in 1952, threw a stag party for him and the Justices. "Hugo, your decisions stink but your bourbon is mighty good," Truman said. All the Justices, from William O. Douglas and William J. Brennan, Jr., to Chief Justices Earl Warren and Warren Burger, were at the house regularly. They discussed cases and more. And in 1951 Justice Black also had a stag dinner for the Court while his daughter Josephine had her classmates over to celebrate their high school graduation. After the meal, he called for her to bring them downstairs. "President Truman wants to play the piano for them." "Call your numbers, anything at all," the President said. He played a current tune. The justices and the President grinned and joined in the (off-key) singing. The girls were astonished.

619 South Lee Street, in short, was a venue of history. It should be preserved as such and in the manner Justice Black wished.

Respectfully,



Roger K. Newman