Born in post-World War II Honolulu Hawaii of newly immigrated Filipino parents, Ruthe Catolico Ashley was the American-born child upon whose parents’ dreams and motivation instilled in her the initiative, drive and work ethic that would result in her many professional achievements. She obtained a bachelor’s and master’s degree in nursing and was the first APA Assistant Professor of Nursing for Cal State University, Los Angeles. Ashley later decided to go to law school after a successful career in nursing.

She was a first-year law student at Pacific McGeorge School of Law and graduated from law school on the day she turned 41. After Roe v. Wade was decided, Ashley became part of the first team of nurses to staff the first federally funded family planning clinic in the Los Angeles area; and she started and staffed the first clinic to counsel pregnant unwed teenagers. She has continued to be a strong advocate for choice and equality. As a nurse, her focus was on Women’s Issues: choice, equality, and access. As a lawyer and a woman of color, her focus expanded and transitioned to the issues of diversity and inclusion.

Ashley has reached the highest levels of leadership in both her legal career and in bar associations and has exercised significant leadership in creating entities designed to enhance diversity in the legal profession for women, women of color and attorneys from diverse backgrounds. Among her most recent and crowning achievements, Ashley demonstrated her leadership by helping to institutionalize the focus on diversity and inclusion as part of the ongoing strategies and goals for the State Bar of California. Ashley worked with members of the legislature to incorporate legislative language requiring the bar to focus on diversity and inclusion initiatives, to present a formal diversity plan to the legislature, and to report every two years on the plan outcomes and modifications.

As the Executive Director Emeritus of California LAW, Ashley created this organization to support the California LAW Pathway with a mission to diversify California’s legal profession through the educational pipeline. California LAW supports the 22 high school law academies, 27 community colleges, 9 undergraduate institutions and law schools creating a 10-year diversity pipeline from 9th grade to the end of law school.

Ashley is considered the diversity pipeline guru for the legal profession in California. As a member of the State Bar of California’s Board of Governors, she chaired the Diversity Pipeline Task Force in 2007, which jump-started the pipeline work in this state. Ashley founded and created the Council on Access and Fairness with the State Bar of California—now a leader in legal diversity across the nation. She was also the first President/CEO of California ALL, and the first Executive Director of California LAW, two non-profit organizations with a mission to diversify the legal profession through the educational pipeline.

In the words of some of her friends and colleagues,

“Ruthe proved to be an exceptional talent: an accomplished and high-energy professional woman who was warm, friendly, authentic—and effective. Ruthe was a natural leader, a ‘self-starter,’ who could be relied upon to develop impactful programs focused on student placement success and support”
– Elizabeth Rindskopf Parker

“Ruthe Ashley is a trailblazer, who through her work on the diversity pipeline, has paved the way to success for women lawyers and contributed to the development of strategies to increase diversity in the legal profession.”
– Judge Brenda Harbin-Forte

“I have watched her as a trailblazer, role model, inspiration, mover/shaker, leader, and Pied Piper of many young women as she has supported, advised and loved them into great women and great lawyers. Her commitment and passion to diversify the legal profession is unwavering.”
– Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye

In October 2019, Ashley was honored to receive the 60,000 member California Lawyers Association Inaugural Civics Engagement Award. Based on her long history of building a diversity law pathway in the California education system, and her reputation as a pipeline guru and expert, her selection as the first recipient of this significant award was celebrated in the legal community.

Ruthe Catolico Ashley has made a significant difference in the profession and in the lives of many. She still contributes almost full time to the projects she cares about—building and sustaining the high school law academies; expanding the pathway to law through the community colleges, undergraduate and law schools; filling the leadership pipeline; actively serving on various legal profession entities; and being available for help, guidance, support and love to anyone who needs or asks. She is truly deserving of the Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award, as her life’s work, career achievements, professional contributions, mentorship and overall humanity fully embody the criteria for this prestigious award.