

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 17, 2001

JUDGE RITA GARMAN NAMED TO ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT

SPRINGFIELD – The Supreme Court of Illinois on Wednesday named Appellate Judge Rita B. Garman to fill the vacancy created by Justice Benjamin K. Miller's announced retirement.

Judge Garman's appointment becomes effective Feb. 1, 2001, and terminates on Dec. 2, 2002. In order to keep the seat beyond then, she will be required to run for election to a 10-year term in 2002.

Judge Garman, a pioneer in breaking down women's professional barriers in college, law school and on the bench in Illinois, will become the second woman to sit on the Illinois Supreme Court. She joins Justice Mary Ann McMorrow, who was elected to the High Court in 1992 from Cook County.

Judge Garman has sat on the bench in Illinois for more than a quarter of a century; first as an associate judge from 1974 to 1986, then a Circuit Court judge from 1986 to 1995 when she was appointed to the Appellate Court from the Fourth Judicial District, which is composed of 30 counties across central Illinois. She was elected to that seat in 1996, running unopposed.

Judge Garman is a scholar, achieving among the highest academic honors at Oswego High School where she was valedictorian; at the College of Commerce of the University of Illinois where she was one of a handful of women in her classes and finished among the top 10 graduates and was named to the Bronze Tablet; and at the University of Iowa, College of Law, where she received her Juris Doctor degree with distinction in 1968.

She also is an educator; a member since 1990, and currently chair, of the Education Committee of the Illinois Judicial Conference; and has served as faculty at numerous seminars and programs as part of the continuing judicial education program for Illinois judges. As a member of the Education Committee, she has been in the forefront of establishing a Judicial College in Illinois, which will meet for its first sessions this coming summer.

“We are very fortunate to have attracted someone of Rita Garman’s caliber to the judiciary,” said Illinois Supreme Court Chief Justice Moses W. Harrison II on her appointment. “She has really distinguished herself as a judge and brings to the Supreme Court a wealth of experience.

“She has been a judge for more than 25 years, is well respected by lawyers who appear in her court and by her colleagues. She has worked hard to contribute to all of our efforts to improve the judiciary and has worked specifically in the field of continuing legal education for judges.

“She has traveled all over the country in an effort to establish a Judicial College in Illinois, which will have its first session at the University of Illinois in Champaign this summer. More important than any other factor is that she is a person of great compassion and of outstanding legal ability, who will prove to reflect well on the Court and be an asset to the court system in Illinois as a justice of the Illinois Supreme Court.”

While a member of the Appellate Court, Judge Garman authored 103 full opinions, issued about 500 unpublished opinions and orders and was involved with hundreds of other cases disposed of by the Appellate Court.

She was the first woman associate judge in the 5th Circuit, the first woman Circuit Judge in the 5th Circuit which includes five counties and the first woman to serve on the Appellate Court in the Fourth District.

She has served as presiding judge of the 5th Circuit and as presiding judge of the Fourth Judicial District.

When she ran for election to the Appellate Court in 1996, Judge Garman was found “exceptionally well qualified” by the Illinois State Bar Association Judicial Appointments Committee. When she ran for retention as a Circuit Court judge in 1992, Judge Garman received approval ratings from 95 to 100 percent of the attorneys who answered a questionnaire about her integrity, impartiality, legal ability, temperament, court management ability, health and meeting the requirements of judicial office.

“Since beginning the practice of law 32 years at the Legal Aid Office in Vermillion County, I have enjoyed every aspect of my profession,” Judge Garman said. “I never could have anticipated the route I would follow or that one day I would be named to the Illinois Supreme Court. I have always tried to be mindful that the courts belong to the citizens of Illinois; and my job as a lawyer, prosecutor and a trial judge was to protect the rights of the people. I expect to continue to protect those rights in my new position.

“I am humbled and honored by the Court’s appointment. I have been privileged to serve as a judge for more than 25 years and have served at every level of the court system. The trust and confidence that have been placed in me by the people and by the Illinois Supreme Court is deeply appreciated. I enthusiastically accept this challenge and look forward to serving as a Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court.”

Following graduation from law school, Judge Garman began her legal career serving indigent clients with the Legal Aid Society. She joined the Vermilion County State’s Attorney’s office in 1969, handling juvenile and family cases, including the enforcement of child support laws, and worked as an assistant state’s attorney until 1973.

She began private practice in 1973 at a law firm and become associate Circuit judge in 1974.

Judge Garman, of Danville, will become the fourth new justice to join the Illinois Supreme Court since December.

Her appointment was approved on a 6-0 vote by the Court with Justice Miller abstaining. Justice Miller announced his retirement on Tuesday, effective Jan. 29, after a 16-year career on the bench to pursue other interests in and outside the law.

Judge Garman, 57, and her husband Gill, an attorney, have two children.