

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**CHIEF JUSTICE MCMORROW TO RECEIVE PRESTIGIOUS AWARD FROM
AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION'S COMMISSION ON WOMEN**

Chief Justice Mary Ann G. McMorrow of the Illinois Supreme Court, the first woman to head one of the three branches of government in Illinois, will be honored and receive the Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award at a luncheon Sunday, August 7 in Chicago for her role as a pioneer and exemplar to women in the legal profession.

Chief Justice McMorrow, the first woman justice to be elected to the Illinois Supreme Court and the first to be selected Chief by her colleagues, will be one of five women to receive the prestigious award established by the American Bar Association Commission on Women in the Profession.

Previous winners include U.S. Supreme Court Justices Sandra Day O'Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Winners are selected on the basis of their professional accomplishments and their role in opening doors for other women lawyers. The award is named for the first woman lawyer in America, Margaret Brent, who arrived in the colonies in 1638.

In addition to Chief Justice McMorrow and the four other recipients, U.S. Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton will receive a special award at the luncheon, to be held from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency Chicago Hotel, 151 E. Wacker Drive, where the American Bar Association is holding its annual meeting.

Chief Justice McMorrow's career has been defined by a series of "firsts," and marked by pioneering opportunities for women in the law.

Encouraged by her mother to attend law school, she was the only woman in her graduating class at Loyola University School of Law in 1953, and was elected class president and associate editor of the law review.

She also was the first woman to prosecute major criminal cases in the Cook County State's Attorney's office. She was appointed to the Illinois Appellate Court by the Supreme Court in 1985, and won election to the appellate bench the following year. She was the first woman to be elected Chairperson of the Executive Committee of the Appellate Court.

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She was the first woman to be elected to the Illinois Supreme Court in 1992, and was retained in 2002. She became its Chief in September 2003.

Chief Justice McMorrow is a past president of the Women's Bar Association of Illinois and recipient of its highest award, the Myra Bradwell Woman of Achievement Award, named for the first woman lawyer in Illinois. She is a member or former member of several bar associations, judicial boards and associations.

She was a faculty adviser at the National Judicial College in Reno, Nevada, and has often served as a faculty member at Illinois Judicial Conferences. She has lectured extensively in seminars and symposiums for judges, lawyers, social workers, psychiatrists and students, and has been active in community programs.

She is a lifelong resident of Chicago, a widow and the mother of one daughter.

Though her credentials as a pioneer are long, she is measured more than by the barriers she has overcome.

Cheryl I. Niro, former president of the Illinois State Bar Association -- one of the groups that supported her nomination for the Brent Award -- put it this way in a letter to the ABA Commission:

“To say that she has been a role model and mentor to literally hundreds of women lawyers doesn't capture it. In some magical way, her presence quietly brings confidence and elegance to the idea that women belong in positions of power and influence.

“She must be one of the strongest, most tenacious people in history. Law school was not an inviting environment when she enrolled. She experienced all of the things that we have heard about past injustices. But her focus has always been forward, and she moves in a constant forward path.

“When she confronts a challenge, she just figures out a way to get past it. When she hits a roadblock, she just finds a graceful way around it. When society said 'No', she just found a way to make it a 'Yes'. For over fifty years, she has never accepted a limit for herself, or for us. She confronted hostility with grace, insult with kindness and doubt with ability. She has dedicated herself to being the best so that we have greater opportunities and fewer struggles.”

Members of the media wishing to witness the awards ceremony must register with the Press Office of the American Bar Association during its meeting at the Hyatt Regency. More information on the Brent award and the honorees may be viewed at www.abanet.org/women/2005margaretbrenthonorees.html

(FOR MORE INFORMATION, please contact Joseph Tybor, press secretary to the Illinois Supreme Court, at 312-793-2323; or David Jaffe, ABA's director of creative services at 312-988-5000, ext. 6139)