



Supreme Court of Illinois

Joseph R. Tybor
Director of Communications

222 North LaSalle Street, 13th Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60601
Telephone (312) 793-2323
Mobile (312) 636-0479
Fax (312) 793-0871

April 26, 2013

CHIEF JUSTICE MOSES W. HARRISON II

Chief Justice Moses W. Harrison II was a judge and a gentleman. Most of all, he was a friend and a champion of ordinary people.

Chief Justice Harrison passed away Thursday, April 25, after a long illness. He was 81.

"My former colleague, friend and mentor Chief Justice Harrison will be remembered as a prominent judge in Illinois legal history not because he was a great man, but because he never lost sight of the common man," said Chief Justice Thomas L. Kilbride "His commitment to equality and fairness went well beyond his simple, succinct, yet superlative opinions. He treated all people in all stations in life with the same kindness, dignity and respect. That fundamental decency guided his work as a judge, and his work guided Illinois law.

"Illinois is a sadder place today because of his death, but it will forever be a better place because of his life."

Justice Harrison was a member of the Illinois judiciary for 29 years; a member of the Illinois Supreme Court for 10 years; and Chief Justice from Jan. 1, 2000 to September 5, 2002, when he retired. His legacy is quite larger.

A Chicago Tribune profile in 1999 described him as "a gentleman rebel, a distinctly gracious man whose convictions are firm and manners mild."

During his tenure on the Supreme Court, he was most known and honored for demonstrating a commitment to justice and human welfare, writing—either for the majority or in dissent—to defend the poor, the weak, the young and the elderly against corporate or government policies which went against their interests.

In November 1998—before the gubernatorial-imposed moratorium on the death penalty—Justice Harrison wrote in a dissenting opinion that the Illinois death penalty was unconstitutional because "the execution of an innocent person is inevitable."

In October 2000, when controversy about the Illinois death penalty was at its height, Chief Justice Harrison issued a public statement noting that the governor had the constitutional power to grant a reprieve

MORE

Chief Justice Moses W. Harrison II

Add One

to stop executions and that a moratorium could be achieved by invoking that authority in every case that came before the governor. Eleven months later, the gubernatorial moratorium was announced.

Chief Justice Harrison appeared on "60 Minutes" with the late Mike Wallace to discuss the Illinois death penalty and he also appeared in the movie, "Too Flawed to Fix: The Illinois Death Penalty Experience."

It was during his tenure as Chief Justice when the Illinois Supreme Court adopted sweeping and, in some cases, unprecedented new rules governing the conduct and trial of death penalty cases -- no longer needed since capital punishment was outlawed recently by the legislature and governor.

When asked how he saw his role as a judge, he said: "It is to protect ordinary citizens against wrongdoing by the government, large corporations and powerful individuals."

Chief Justice Harrison was an intense advocate that lawyers volunteer time and service to represent the poor. In February 2001, he was honored with the Illinois State Bar Association's Access to Justice Award; and in a speech accepting the award, he challenged each Illinois attorney to give at least one hour a day in free legal services to the poor and disadvantaged.

Last year alone, Illinois attorneys reported giving more than 2.1 million hours in free legal services and contributing an additional \$16 million to organizations that provide pro bono services.

Chief Justice Harrison also was an advocate of educating citizens about the courts. He was the guiding force behind the establishment by the Court and the Illinois Judges Association of the Illinois Judicial Speakers Bureau, which attempts to match judges from around the state with requests from community groups for speakers.

He also recommended that the Court establish an Advanced Judicial Academy which invites experts from around the nation to address Illinois judges on cutting edge issues in the law and judiciary. This year's four-day biennial Academy at the University of Illinois College of Law deals with, among other issues, "Understanding and Combating Implicit Racial and Gender Bias in Our Work as Judges."

Chief Justice Harrison was born in Collinsville and educated in Collinsville public schools. He said his beliefs were forged in his small-town Southern Illinois upbringing. He was the son of a dentist and a registered nurse. He said he emerged from Collinsville with the philosophy that, "The reason for our existence is to help other people" and "the way you should judge people is how they treat other people on a day-to-day basis."

Chief Justice Harrison received his undergraduate degree from Colorado College in 1954 and his law degree from Washington University School of Law in St. Louis in 1958. He practiced law in East St. Louis and later in Collinsville over a period of 15 years.

In 1973, he was appointed Circuit Judge by the Illinois Supreme Court and was elected to that position in 1974. At the time of his appointment, he was senior partner of the law firm of Harrison, Rarick and Cadagin in Collinsville. He served two terms as Chief Judge of the Third Judicial Circuit in Edwardsville during his six years on the Circuit Court.

MORE

Chief Justice Moses W. Harrison II
Add Two

In 1979, Judge Harrison was appointed to the Illinois Appellate Court, Fifth District, in Mount Vernon. He was elected in 1989 to that position and was retained by voters in 1990. During his service on the Illinois Appellate Court, he served two terms as Presiding Judge (chief judge) of the Fifth District Appellate Court. He also served one term as chairman of the Illinois Appellate Courts and on numerous Supreme Court committees.

He was elected to the Supreme Court in 1993; selected by his colleagues as Chief Justice, effective January 1, 2000 and retired from the bench on September 5, 2002.

Chief Justice Harrison was a member of the American Bar Association, the Illinois State Bar Association, the Metropolitan Bar Association of St. Louis, the Tri-City Bar Association, the Madison County Bar Association, the Justinian Society of Lawyers (the Italian-American Bar Association) and the Illinois Judges Association. He served as president of the Madison County Bar Association and was a member of the Board of Governors of the Illinois State Bar Association.

Chief Justice Harrison was offered many awards, but he chose to accept only a few: the ISBA Access to Justice Award; the Washington University School of Law Distinguished Alumni Award; the David Lee Hoskins, Jr., Humanitarian Award; and the Humanitarian Award of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People.

He was former senior warden of Christ Episcopal Church of Collinsville and a member of the Vestry. At the time of his death, he was a member of St. Michael's Episcopal Church in O'Fallon. He served as vice president and board member of the First Bank of Maryville. He also was a board member and secretary of the Maryville Colonial Nursing Home, Inc. He was a member of the Board of the Collinsville Lions Club and a life member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Dr. Clarence and Loretta (nee O'Hara) Harrison; and a son, Luke W. Harrison.

Surviving are his wife of 51 years, Sharon (nee Phillips) whom he married on Dec. 30, 1961 in Collinsville; his son, Clarence and his wife, Carol, and their daughters Lauren and Rachel Harrison; and grandchildren Sarah and Jacob Harrison and their mother, Mary.

Memorials may be made to St. Michael's Episcopal Church, 111 O'Fallon Troy Road, O'Fallon, Ill. 62269; or the Justinian Society of Lawyers Scholarship Fund, 734 N. Wells St., Chicago Ill. 60610.

There will be a private family funeral.

--30--

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: Joseph Tybor, director of communications to the Illinois Supreme Court, at 312.793.2323)