



# Supreme Court of Illinois

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## JUSTICE RITA B. GARMAN ELECTED AS NEXT SUPREME COURT CHIEF JUSTICE

CHICAGO - The Illinois Supreme Court announced Thursday that Justice Rita B. Garman will be its next Chief Justice, continuing her remarkable and unprecedented journey to the top of the state's judiciary.

Justice Garman was chosen unanimously by her fellow justices to succeed Chief Justice Thomas L. Kilbride, who will leave a notable legacy of achievement when his term as Chief concludes October 25. Justice Garman will become the 119th Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court when she assumes the position beginning a three-year term on October 26.

She will become the second woman in Illinois to be Chief Justice and the second woman to head one of the three branches of government in Illinois. Her selection as Chief Justice on the seven-member Court culminates her long service to the people of Illinois. There are more than 950 judges in Illinois, and Justice Garman has served in the judiciary longer than all of them--except one.

She first wore the judicial robe in 1974 as an associate judge in Danville in the 5<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit, and will mark her 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary as an Illinois judge next January 7.

"I am honored and humbled to have been chosen by my colleagues to serve as Chief Justice," Justice Garman said. "This office has been held by many great jurists, several of whom I have served with and count among my friends. I welcome the challenges and the responsibility that go with the role of Chief Justice because I know that I can count on the support of my colleagues at all levels of the judiciary and the members of the Illinois bar."

Justice Garman has served on the Supreme Court since February 1, 2001, about two months after Chief Justice Kilbride and former Chief Justice Robert R. Thomas were sworn in as justices following their election.

"I have served with Rita Garman for nearly my entire tenure on the Illinois Supreme Court," said Justice Kilbride. "We have not only worked together as colleagues, but she has become a dear friend. She has an extraordinary combination of intellect, temperament, and experience that will serve well our Court, our judiciary and our state.

**MORE**

## **Justice Garman Next Chief Justice Add One**

"It is my privilege to turn over the office of Chief Justice to her, and I look forward to following her in the years ahead."

Justice Thomas said, "Rita will make an outstanding Chief Justice. She is smart, she is passionate about the cause of justice, and she is a natural leader. This court will thrive under her leadership."

During Chief Justice Kilbride's tenure as Chief, the Court approved several key initiatives. They include enhancing the use of technology in all Illinois courts by encouraging electronic filing and other digital means of doing court business; establishing a pilot project allowing cameras in Illinois trial courtrooms; and creating the Commission on Access to Justice to make it easier for all parties, including the poor and those with limited English proficiency, to navigate the Illinois court system.

"I have served with and learned from those who have been Chief Justice - not only Tom Kilbride and Bob Thomas," said Justice Garman. "But from my colleague Charles Freeman; from retired Justice Tom Fitzgerald; from Mary Ann McMorrow, the first woman on the Supreme Court and the first woman Chief Justice, and from Moses Harrison—both of whom we mourned this year on their passing. I owe a special debt to retired Chief Justice Ben Miller. All have been friends. I have learned much, and will take much, from their example as I assume this new role, and ensure that the Court truly serves the people of the State of Illinois."

She said she will work to ensure prompt judicial decision-making at all levels of the court system "because justice delayed is justice denied."

"I will support the increased use of technology in our courthouses and courtrooms—initiatives advanced by the Supreme Court under Chief Justice Kilbride – so that the public may be better informed about the work of our courts. I will place particular emphasis on judicial education because the public is best served by judges whose knowledge is current and wide-ranging."

"And I will do all that I can to encourage civility and ethical conduct among the members of the bench and bar because we all serve the public best when we put our egos aside and concentrate on doing the work of the people."

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Justice Garman was raised in Oswego in Kendall County and exhibited scholarship throughout her academic career.

She was class valedictorian at Oswego High School and accumulated several honors at the University of Illinois where she enrolled in a six-year Commerce and Law program. One of a handful of women in the College of Commerce, she received her bachelor's degree in economics with highest honors, was a Top 10 graduate and was named to the Bronze Tablet.

She received her J.D. degree with distinction from the University of Iowa College of Law.

**MORE**

## **Justice Garman Next Chief Justice Add Two**

She grew up always wanting to be a lawyer and she continually had the encouragement of her late parents ---Dr. Sheldon and Ellen Bell; but that could not be said of all of her law school professors. She was one of five women in her law school class of 100, and it wasn't uncommon for her to hear admonishments from her professors for what they described as taking up the law school space of a man.

“I was told: ‘You know you’ll never practice law. You’re just here to catch a husband,’” she recalls.

She began her legal career with the Vermilion County Legal Aid Society at a salary of \$90 a week. She later served as an assistant state's attorney for Vermilion County, trying criminal and juvenile cases. She also engaged in private practice in Danville.

Her judicial career began at the age of 30 as an associate judge in Vermilion County in 1974. She was elected a Circuit judge in the 5<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit in 1986, and served as Presiding Circuit judge in Vermilion County from 1987 to 1998, when she was assigned to the Illinois Appellate Court, Fourth District. She was elected to the Appellate Court the following year.

Justice Garman was appointed to the Supreme Court, effective February 1, 2001, to fill the vacancy created by the retirement of former Chief Justice Ben Miller. She was elected to the Supreme Court for a ten-year term in 2002 and retained for a second term in 2012. When she began serving on the Supreme Court, she joined the late Chief Justice Mary Ann McMorrow, who was the first woman to serve on the Supreme Court and the first woman to serve as its Chief.

In addition to being the longest-serving woman judge in Illinois, Justice Garman will be the first Chief Justice to have served in virtually every judicial capacity: Associate Judge, Circuit Judge, Presiding Circuit Judge, Appellate Justice, Presiding Appellate Justice, Supreme Court Justice and soon-to-be Chief Justice.

Since she has been on the Supreme Court, Justice Garman has written and participated in hundreds of opinions; and has been an active participant in the Court’s many administrative functions.

She recommended that the Supreme Court establish a Special Committee on Child Custody Issues to ensure that the best interests of children is the prime focus of all custody cases, and that all child custody proceedings be scheduled and heard on an expedited basis. Justice Garman still serves as Supreme Court liaison to the special committee.

She also serves as Supreme Court liaison to the Conference of Chief Circuit Judges, the Committee on Judicial Performance Evaluation and the Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission.

Justice Garman is a member of the Vermilion County Bar Association, the Illinois State Bar Association, the Iowa State Bar Association, the East Central Illinois Women’s Bar Association, the Central Illinois Women’s Bar Association, and the Lincoln-Douglas Inn of Court.

She also is a member of the Illinois Judges Association, which awarded her a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2007 and the inaugural Harold Sullivan Award for Judicial Excellence in 2011.

**MORE**

**Justice Garman Next Chief Justice  
Add Three**

Justice Garman is an active member of her community. She is a member of the Danville Rotary Club, a director emeritus of the Danville Symphony Orchestra and the 708 Mental Health Board. She also is a member of the Board of Directors of the University of Illinois Alumni Association.

She has earned numerous other awards and honors and has been a frequent speaker at a wide variety of events and before diverse audiences, including school children and service organizations.

She and her husband, Gill, a Danville attorney, have two children and three grandchildren.

In a related order, the Supreme Court appointed Justice Lloyd A. Karmeier to be a member of the Illinois Courts Commission to replace Justice Garman on that body when she becomes Chief Justice. The Illinois Courts Commission is a constitutionally established tribunal which sits as a court in the discipline of judges.

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