

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

JUSTICE CORNELIA A. “CONNIE” CLARK

September 10, 1950 – September 24, 2021

June 2022

Justice Cornelia A. “Connie” Clark was born on September 10, 1950, in Franklin, Tennessee. She lived her entire adult life in the city, where ten generations of her family also have resided. She passed away peacefully at her Franklin home on September 24, 2021, at the age of 71. Fittingly, she was surrounded by her beloved and devoted family, including her sister, Cathy, her sister-in-law, Lulu, her nephews, and her great-nieces and nephews, all of whom she absolutely adored.

Justice Clark faithfully served the Tennessee judiciary and her community for more than four decades in so many ways. She began her service as a teacher, a role she enjoyed and brought to her work in the judiciary. She earned her undergraduate degree at Vanderbilt in 1971 and then earned a master of arts in teaching at Harvard University in 1972. She taught high school history and government before entering Vanderbilt Law School, where she was a member of the editorial board for the Vanderbilt Law Review and the only student member of the 1979-80 dean search committee.

After law school, Justice Clark practiced law in Nashville and Franklin. In 1984, she became one of the first female partners in a large Nashville law firm. She specialized in municipal and employment law, and represented many cities, police departments, and several school boards.

She also joined legal organizations that advocated for the advancement of women in leadership roles, including the Lawyers’ Association for Women, Marion Griffin Chapter, and the Tennessee Lawyers’ Association for Women. She chaired the Board of Directors of the Nashville YWCA and served on the Board of the League of Women Voters of Williamson County. Throughout the 1980s, Justice Clark supported and advocated for more women to be appointed and elected to the bench.

Her turn to join the judiciary came in 1989, when Governor Ned McWherter appointed Justice Clark to the trial bench covering the 21st Judicial District of Williamson, Hickman, Perry, and Lewis Counties. In this role she became the first female trial judge to serve rural counties in Tennessee. She served the 21st judicial district for ten years, paving the way for future female judges to be accepted by clerks, litigants, lawyers, and other judges.

Justice Clark's excellent service as a trial judge did not go unnoticed. In 1999, the Tennessee Supreme Court asked her to serve as Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts. Not surprisingly, Justice Clark excelled in this role as well. She spearheaded the Court's efforts to modernize judicial policies, processes, and programs, while also instilling professionalism and excellence in the office and staff of the AOC. She created methods and models that are still utilized today at the AOC.

In 2005, Justice Clark was named to the Tennessee Supreme Court, becoming only the fourth woman in state history to serve as a justice. In 2008, Justice Clark was delighted to be a part of the Court with the first female majority in state history. The Court has remained majority female since 2008, and Justice Clark would be thrilled that her passing did not change that fact.

In 2010, Justice Clark became the second female to serve a two-year term as Chief Justice. In 2014, she ran for re-election and won another eight-year term, despite an organized and well-funded campaign to defeat her. Justice Clark served the Court until her death last year. She attained 16 years of service, the second longest tenure of any woman to serve on the Supreme Court to date. She participated in more than 1,100 cases during her tenure.

Even more importantly, Justice Clark was an exemplary role model for all judges. She was well-known for her precise and detailed legal analysis and writing style, as well as being an active and thoughtful questioner during oral arguments. Justice Clark's judicial temperament was aptly described as "pitch-perfect." She was calm and measured during tense and sometimes divided Court discussions. She looked for solutions to disagreements among the Court that would aid the Court in achieving unanimous or majority decisions on difficult issues. She was brilliant and also incredibly fair. She was fully committed to deciding cases on the facts and the law, without regard to her own personal preferences and to political considerations. Her institutional knowledge and expertise were unsurpassed and irreplaceable. Her reverence and respect for the Court as an institution were remarkable.

Her passion for the principle of equal justice under law was illustrated in Justice Clark's work as the Supreme Court's liaison to the Access to Justice

Commission from 2014 until her death. Justice Clark wholeheartedly embraced this initiative. She travelled the State and also around the country speaking to attorneys, judges, and other interested groups about the importance of judicial support for such activities. She pioneered the successful Faith and Justice Alliance, which brings attorneys into community faith-based and other civic organizations, where clients may feel more comfortable about sharing their problems than in a traditional courthouse or law firm setting. Today, hundreds of Tennessee houses of worship provide thousands of hours of pro bono legal service to more than 7,000 people a year. Justice Clark's leadership and unwavering support as liaison made it possible for Tennessee to be recognized as a national leader in access to justice initiatives.

Justice Clark's scope of work, however, extended far beyond the Supreme Court. She was involved in nearly every program and project in the court system, and she was a fixture in bar, community, and religious organizations in Middle Tennessee and nationally for more than 40 years.

Justice Clark chaired the Tennessee Judicial Council and was the inaugural chair of the Judicial Evaluation Commission. She previously served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Conference of State Court Administrators. In 2004, she was named one of the 21 members of the ABA Commission on the American Jury, which is dedicated to educating the public about, and reinvigorating the nation's commitment to, jury service.

She never lost her love for teaching and frequently served as an instructor at the National Judicial College, American Academy of Judicial Education, and the American Institute for Justice, in addition to being a frequent guest speaker at various bar and other organizations. Justice Clark served for ten years as an adjunct professor at the Vanderbilt University School of Law and served on the faculty of the Nashville School of Law. As a trial judge, Justice Clark served as Vice President of the Tennessee Judicial Conference and Dean of the Tennessee Judicial Academy, and was a member of the Supreme Court Commissions on the Rules of Civil Procedure and Technology.

She spoke frequently to civic and leadership groups about the importance of the rule of law and of an independent, accountable judiciary in protecting the constitutional rights accorded all persons and groups.

Justice Clark also received numerous professional honors during her career, including the Janice M. Holder Access to Justice Award from the Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services; the Tennessee Bar Association's Justice Frank F. Drowota III Outstanding Judicial Service Award; the Vanderbilt University

School of Law Distinguished Service Award; the Grayfred Gray Award from the Tennessee Association of Professional Mediators; the Judge Martha Craig Daughtrey Award from the Lawyers' Association for Women - Marion Griffin Chapter; the Liberty Bell Award given by the Williamson County Bar Association; and the Pioneer Award from Vision 2020. Clark was also named Appellate Judge of the Year by the Southeastern Chapter of the American Board of Trial Advocates and was inducted into the Nashville YWCA Academy for Women of Achievement, having served as a past president of the YWCA of Nashville and Middle Tennessee.

She has also served on the boards of Goodwill Industries of Middle Tennessee and the Heritage Foundation of Franklin and Williamson County, which recognized her with its Patrons Award. She was a Fellow of the Nashville, Tennessee and American Bar Foundations, and was the first woman to serve as chair of the Tennessee Bar Foundation. She was also active in the Nashville and Williamson County communities, serving as board chair of the United Methodist Publishing House; a trustee of Martin Methodist College; and as a lay leader at First United Methodist in Franklin. To honor her many contributions to the Franklin community, the City of Franklin Board of Mayor and Alderman recently honored Justice Clark by honorarily renaming Fourth Avenue in Franklin in her honor. Justice Clark lived on Fourth Avenue practically her entire adult life.

Justice Clark was a member of the Williamson County Bar Association, Tennessee Bar Association, American Bar Association, Tennessee Lawyers' Association for Women (founding member), Lawyers' Association for Women, Marion Griffin Chapter (former board member), Nashville Bar Association (former board member and Second Vice President), National Association of Women Judges, and the Nashville, Tennessee, and American Bar Foundations. She was the first woman to serve as chair of the Tennessee Bar Foundation. She also was a member of the Tennessee John Marshall American Inn of Court and the Harry Phillips American Inn of Court. In total, Justice Clark served on more than 25 boards and worked with nearly 75 organizations, commissions, advisory groups, or task forces since beginning her legal career in 1979.

Justice Clark devoted herself to public service, and she made every organization and institution she served better in immeasurable ways. 1st Peter 4:10 states: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." Our friend, Justice Connie Clark, fulfilled this Biblical command better than anyone I have ever known. She profoundly displayed God's lavish grace through her untiring

service to her family, community, legal profession, judiciary, and State. Today, we mourn the passing of Justice Clark but celebrate her life of devoted and tireless service as a faithful steward of God's grace.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Tennessee Judicial Conference that the foregoing Memorial Resolution in honor of Justice Cornelia A. "Connie" Clark, be entered on the minutes of this conference, that a copy be furnished to the West Publishing Company for inclusion in *Tennessee Decisions* and **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that copies thereof be furnished to members of her family.

Respectfully submitted this 15th day of June, 2022.

Jeffrey S. Bivins,
Justice, Tennessee Supreme Court