



**PRESS RELEASE**  
June 4, 2019

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## **SENIOR U.S. DISTRICT JUDGE ELLEN BREE BURNS DIES AT AGE 95**

Judge Ellen Bree Burns, a beloved member of the United States District Court for the District of Connecticut for 37 years, died at age 95 on June 3, 2019. Revered by many for her fairness and patience, Judge Burns was a trailblazer and a legend. She was the first woman to be appointed a judge to the state bench in Connecticut, the first woman to be named to the federal bench in Connecticut, the first woman to serve as Chief Judge of the District of Connecticut, and the longest serving woman in District of Connecticut history.

Nominated by President Jimmy Carter, Judge Burns was appointed to serve as a federal judge on May 17, 1978. She assumed the role of Chief Judge of the District on November 18, 1988, serving in that capacity until she took senior status on September 1, 1992. Over the course of nearly four decades, Judge Burns presided over hundreds of cases, both criminal and civil. She retired from the bench at age 91 on March 31, 2015.

Born in New Haven on December 13, 1923, and raised in Hamden, Judge Burns received a Bachelor of Arts degree, *summa cum laude*, from Albertus Magnus College in 1944 and an LL.B. degree from Yale Law School in 1947. She was one of only three women in her law school class. Judge Burns served as Director of Legislative Legal Services of the Legislative Commissioners' Office for 24 years, from 1949 to 1973, helping to shape the Connecticut General Statutes. In 1973, Governor Thomas J. Meskill, Jr. appointed her to the state Circuit Court, making her the first female state judge in Connecticut, and elevated her to the Court of Common Pleas the following year. Just two years later, Governor Ella T. Grasso appointed Judge Burns to the Superior Court.

Chief Judge Stefan R. Underhill said, "My colleagues and I are deeply saddened by the passing of Judge Burns, our dear friend and beloved colleague. Judge Burns was a kind and brilliant jurist, and the people of our state were enriched by her service, temperament, and commitment to justice. Her tremendous legacy will forever inspire judges and lawyers to work for greater fairness in our legal system."

Judge Burns is remembered as being incredibly smart, patient, humble, caring and sensitive to the needs of all individuals who appeared before her. She was noted for her ability to let attorneys try their case, while she controlled the courtroom to ensure collegiality and fairness.

Judge José A. Cabranes, who serves on the Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, said Judge Burns was "A wonderful colleague and one who was justifiably respected for her exemplary life and career."

Although she enjoyed an illustrious judicial career spanning 42 years, and received numerous awards recognizing her contributions to the legal profession, Judge Burns once remarked that what she was most proud of was her three children, who are all lawyers. During an interview before her retirement, when asked whether there was anything she was particularly proud of

when she looked back at her career, Judge Burns was quoted as saying, "I hope that I have done a good job. I hope that I have made the right decisions. I just hope that people feel that I have done a good job for them, and that I fulfilled the responsibilities of the job in an appropriate way."

Recalled U.S. Magistrate Judge Joan G. Margolis, who served as one of Judge Burns' first law clerks, said, "For all of us female attorneys and judges, she has always been a stellar role model, professionally and personally. We have all tried to aspire to follow in her footsteps, as best we can."

During her lifetime, Judge Burn received numerous prestigious awards, including: the Connecticut Bar Association Award for Service to the Bar and Legislature in 1971; the Judiciary Award from the Connecticut Trial Lawyers Association in 1978; the Judiciary Award of the Connecticut Bar Association in 1987; and the Raymond E. Baldwin Public Service Award of the Bridgeport School of Law at Quinnipiac College (as it was called) in 1992. Judge Burns was a trustee of Albertus Magnus College, and a Fellow of the American Bar Foundation and the Connecticut Bar Foundation; she was also a member of the New Haven County Bar Association, the Connecticut Bar Association, and the American Bar Association.

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