



**PRESS RELEASE**  
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**CONTACT**  
Robin Tabora: (203) 773-2140

## **F. OWEN EAGAN, FORMER U.S. MAGISTRATE JUDGE AND LEGENDARY MEDIATOR**

Former United States Magistrate Judge F. Owen Eagan, Connecticut's second, full-time magistrate judge, died on March 2, 2021. He was 90 years old. Highly revered and fondly referred to as a "quiet voice of reason," Judge Eagan humbly served the people of Connecticut with admirable distinction for two decades, from December 1, 1975 to June 6, 1996.

"Judge Eagan was a beloved colleague and an inspiration to the legal community of our state," said Chief U.S. District Judge Stefan R. Underhill. "His genuine compassion for all people, his devotion to justice, and his genius for successfully mediating some of the most complex legal cases continue to impact all who knew him. My colleagues and I are eternally grateful for his indelible example."

Born on October 2, 1930, in Windsor, Connecticut to Francis Joseph and Mazie Eagan, Judge Eagan married his high school sweetheart, Joan (Mullaney) Eagan, on December 13, 1952. Married for 62 years, they were one of the founding couples of The Church of St. Timothy, located in West Hartford. He is survived by his children: Mary Ann, Michael, Owen, and Margie, and their respective spouses, Geralyn, Judy, and Richard. He was also a devoted grandfather to his seven grandchildren: Mike, Kerry, Kevin, Caley, Maura, Owen, and Aidan; as well as their respective spouses, Elizabeth, Derrick, Charlie, Nick, and Saige. Finally, he leaves five beloved great-grandchildren: Tyler, Conor, Shea, William, and Tate.

Judge Eagan attended Cranwell Preparatory School, received his undergraduate degree from Georgetown University in 1952, and his law degree from the Georgetown University Law Center in 1956. Prior to attending law school, he proudly served as captain in the U.S. Air Force during the Korean War.

Following law school, Judge Eagan served as an Assistant United States Attorney and, in 1964, was appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson as the 34<sup>th</sup> United States Attorney for the District of Connecticut.

Prior to his selection as a United States magistrate judge, Judge Eagan practiced law at Eagan, Jackson, O'Keefe and Murray in West Hartford, where he was a senior partner. He also taught trial advocacy at Western New England School of Law from 1978 to 1995. Following his retirement from the federal bench, he served as a private mediator for 17 years and founded the Canterbury Resolution Center, a mediation firm located in West Hartford. In addition, until age 85, he served as a judge on the Mohegan Tribe Gaming Disputes Court, a court system that he helped create.

Judge José A. Cabranes of the Second Circuit Court of Appeals, remembers Judge Eagan as “an extraordinarily kind person and one for whom I always had the highest regard. He was, of course, a close friend.”

“Judge Eagan was a masterful mediator and a very kind and good human being who cared deeply for others,” recalls Senior U.S. District Judge Janet C. Hall. “He epitomized humility and, in his own special way, challenged us as judges and lawyers to be better human beings and to do what is right and just.”

In addition to the law, Judge Eagan was highly dedicated to his family, instilling in his children the importance of serving others. When he swore in his son, Owen P. Eagan, as a probate judge for West Hartford on November 30, 2016, Judge Eagan said, “I wanted my kids to help people because that’s what God put us here for. You have that obligation to help people.”

Helping people, regardless of their background, is another recurring theme that depicts Judge Eagan’s legacy. “He was an outstanding public servant,” remarked Recalled U.S. Magistrate Judge Holly B. Fitzsimmons. “The law enforcement community loved him; criminal defendants felt that he heard and dealt with them fairly ... One of the reasons he was so good at settling cases was that lawyers and litigants found his input practical and persuasive. It was never about him; always about the participants in a case or proceeding. To his fellow judges, he was a role model, particularly of judicial temperament ... I think he left a profound and lasting impact on all of us who knew him,” concluded Fitzsimmons, who appeared before Judge Eagan regularly as a lawyer and served alongside him as a magistrate judge.

During a span of twenty years on the bench, Judge Eagan presided over a plethora of civil cases. For example, he singlehandedly settled or tried 1,000 of the cases filed by the Federal Deposit Insurance Company, which sought repayment of delinquent loans on behalf of failed banks. The cases resulted from the infamous real-estate market crash of the 1980s, and they involved millions and millions of dollars in defaulted loans as well as complicated issues of banking and commercial law.

In 1981, he presided over a consolidated action involving inmates who were challenging the conditions of their confinement. The case was tried over a period of 18 days and required Judge Eagan to make two trips to the Hartford Community Correctional Center and one to the Metropolitan Correctional Center (“MCC”) located in Manhattan, New York. *Lareau v. Manson*, 507 F. Supp. 1177, 1178 (D. Conn. 1980), *aff’d in part, modified in part and remanded*, 651 F.2d 96 (2d Cir. 1981).

In 1984, Judge Eagan negotiated a consent decree in a federal class action suit, known as *Connecticut Association for Retarded Citizens, Inc. v. Thome*. In that case, the state was sued for violating the U.S. Constitution and other federal laws designed to protect disabled citizens who resided at the Mansfield Training School, which was located in Mansfield, Connecticut. The consent decree paved the way for more individuals with limited intellectual abilities to be moved out of large institutions, such as Mansfield, and into the community. It also committed the state to provide greater resources for the individuals, including a network of group homes and called for the closing of the school in 1993. Judge Eagan held a fairness

hearing on the consent decree that lasted six months, and he patiently listened to hours and hours of testimony of parents, experts, advocates, and concerned citizens.

Two months before the school closed, Judge Eagan granted a motion for preliminary injunction after finding that state agencies had failed to provide sufficient procedural safeguards to ensure that do not resuscitate (“DNR”) orders accurately reflected the wishes of individuals with intellectual disabilities. The case involved medical directives that were routinely issued by physicians and placed in patients' medical files prior to the onset of a terminal illness. Often, those decisions were made by state-licensed doctors and state-appointed guardians who had no relation to the patients. Judge Eagan found the circumstances of the case especially troubling because the decisions were based, in part, on the level of the individual's intellectual disability. *Connecticut Ass'n For Retarded Citizens, Inc. v. Thorne*, No. 95070321, 1993 WL 765698, at \*8 (D. Conn. Feb. 9, 1993).

At a gathering held on April 25, 1993, to celebrate the closing of the Mansfield Training School, Judge Eagan said it was the residents of the training school who helped make the case “the most unique and rewarding” of his 17-year career on the bench. He continued to oversee the implementation of the consent decree until he retired in 1996.

Judge Eagan is remembered as a jurist who was always willing to go the extra distance to protect the dignity of those whom he served.

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