

Supreme Court of Colorado

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SUPREME COURT OF COLORADO

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With the death of former Chief Justice Mary J. Mullarkey, Colorado has lost a pioneering leader who worked tirelessly to improve the justice system and how it treated people as they navigated its often-difficult pathways.

She held positions as an attorney in the federal and state governments before Gov. Roy Romer appointed her to the Colorado Supreme Court in 1987, when she became only the second woman to serve on the court. In 1998, the Court chose her to serve as Chief Justice. She was the first woman to serve in that role, and was the longest-serving Chief Justice in Colorado history. She remained Chief Justice until her retirement in November 2010.

“Chief Justice Mullarkey was the consummate public servant,” Chief Justice Brian D. Boatright said. “She dedicated her wisdom, knowledge and compassion to improving our justice system in countless ways, from requiring safe places for children in all the state’s courthouses to making our state a leader in information technology for the courts. Outside of her legal work, she also will be remembered for her decade-long effort to replace the old and inadequate seat of the Colorado Judicial Branch with the magnificent Ralph L. Carr Colorado Judicial Center.”

Before she was appointed to the Supreme Court, Chief Justice Mullarkey honored her calling to public service by working as an attorney in various roles for the state and federal governments.

She authored hundreds of opinions during her 23 years on the Supreme Court, and oversaw a wide range of innovations and improvements to Colorado’s court systems, both inside and outside the courtroom. She strengthened the Judicial Branch’s ability to withstand and recover from budget setbacks, called on court personnel to make the operations of the Judicial Department more consumer-friendly, encouraged judges to become more involved in their communities, and resolutely sought to improve diversity in the legal profession.

“Chief Justice Mullarkey was an inspiration to countless women who admired her tenacity in overcoming barriers in the legal profession,” Justice Monica M. Márquez said. “Hearing her stories about being one of just a few women in her class at the Harvard Law School, for example, was a reminder of how hard she and other pioneers worked to blaze a trail for other women in the law. She was a powerful early advocate for diversity in the legal profession, including our courts, and her hard work forged a lasting legacy in Colorado.”

Chief Justice Mullarkey was born in Wisconsin in 1943 and received her law degree from Harvard Law School in 1968. She was working as an attorney for the U.S. Interior Department, primarily on equal employment matters, when she and her husband, Tom Korson, moved to Colorado in 1971. She went to work for the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 1973, and later began working for the state government, where she served in several positions including Solicitor General and legal advisor to Gov. Richard D. Lamm before her appointment to the Supreme Court.