

# Wisconsin Municipal Judges Association: Statement on Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson

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Wisconsin – indeed, the nation – lost a legal giant today with the passing of former Wisconsin Supreme Court Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson.

We became acquainted – literally by accident – in the winter of 1979 when I was a law student at the University of Wisconsin and slid on a wet stair in the State Capitol. My bumpy ride ended at her feet at the bottom of the staircase. A few years later when I drafted the American Bar Association’s standards for the fair treatment of child abuse victims in court proceedings we discussed how courts can meet those challenges while still ensuring the rights of defendants. And a few years ago as a member of the Wisconsin Judicial Conference I appreciated her recognition of municipal courts as the “face” of justice for most people in our state whose only contact with the courts may come when they get a traffic ticket. Shortly thereafter Chief Justice Abrahamson met with municipal judges and reminded us of our responsibility to always “do the right thing” as the “face of justice” in Wisconsin and like good umpires to “call ‘em as we see ‘em.”

Few people will ever have the fidelity and enthusiasm that Chief Justice Abrahamson demonstrated toward the Wisconsin Constitution that she felt was forgotten all too often. Her legal scholarship was more than “a cut above” and her opinions did not shy away from controversy. Even if you disagreed with her – which happened on more than one occasion – you had to admit that she did her homework and articulated her opinions with exhaustively researched and articulated analysis. She was also a zealous and tireless advocate for maintaining the independence of a fair, impartial and vibrant judiciary.

Chief Justice Abrahamson matched her legal scholarship with an uncanny connection to the human condition. More often than not how the law impacted “the little guy” was a significant factor in her opinions. Despite her busy schedule she found time to be a role model for law students and, in particular, for increasing the participation of women in the study and practice of law and service on the bench.

On behalf of the Wisconsin Municipal Judges Association and myself I extend the deepest condolences to her friends and family and also to the people of our state who share in the loss of this exemplary public servant, legal scholar and role model.

Richard Alan Ginkowski

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