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**FORMER WISCONSIN CHIEF JUSTICE ABRAHAMSON REMEMBERED AS NOT ONLY A FIRST, BUT
A FIRST-RATE LEGAL MIND OVER THE DECADES**

**Mandell: She never lost sight of the role of the judiciary in service to all people and
understanding the impact of the Court's decisions beyond its walls.**

MADISON, WI. DECEMBER 21, 2020 – As we remember former Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson, Jeff Mandell, Law Forward's founder and President, issued the following statement today:

“Justice Abrahamson was a woman of firsts: graduating first in her law school class, the only woman in that class, the first woman on the State Supreme Court and then its first female Chief Justice. But she was never just a first. Her lifelong commitment to equal justice under the law left its mark on the judiciary, both in Wisconsin and beyond. The intersection of her first-rate legal mind and her willingness to go anywhere to sit with the everyday people affected by the Courts rulings made her a powerful force for justice. **She never lost sight of the role of the judiciary in service to all people and understanding the impact of the Court's decisions beyond its walls.**”

The people of Wisconsin felt Justice Abrahamson's impact in nearly every facet of our lives; we will feel her absence just as keenly.

While it is true Justice Abrahamson paved the way for many women who would follow (including those that followed her to the high court, where women now hold a six of seven seats) her other talents and accomplishments as a legal scholar loom just as large. She was a forceful advocate who was never afraid to break from her colleagues to advance her vision of the law. In *State v. Mitchell* she balanced the competing constitutional principles to permit a state hate-crime statute, writing: “Bigots are free to think and express themselves as they wish, except that they may not engage in criminal conduct in furtherance of their beliefs.” Her opinion broke from her colleagues, who struck down the law, but the U.S. Supreme Court later adopted her view.

We will miss Justice Abramson's intellect and passion, which defined her 43 years on the bench. Generations of lawyers have looked up to her as a leader in our profession. We are comforted by knowing that her memory, and her work, live on through her clerks, her students, and the thousands of Wisconsin lawyers touched by her dedication and brilliant mind.

We send our deepest condolences to Justice Abrahamson's son Daniel and his family. We pray that they find solace in their memories of this remarkable woman. Her memory will indeed be a blessing.”

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Law Forward is a non-profit law firm focused on protecting and advancing democracy in Wisconsin. We use impact litigation, the administrative process, and public education to protect Wisconsin's fundamental democratic principles, and revive Wisconsin's traditional commitment to clean and open government. Learn more about our work at LawForward.org.