



Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia

News

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Kanawha County Circuit Judge Joanna Tabit Dies

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. – Thirteenth Judicial Circuit (Kanawha County) Judge Joanna Tabit has died.

“Judge Joanna Tabit was a beloved West Virginian and member of our judiciary family,” said Chief Justice Beth Walker. “I always admired her commitment to her work, warm sense of humor, and generous spirit. She mentored so many younger lawyers — including me — and our hearts are heavy today. Judge Tabit and her family are in our prayers.”

Justice John Hutchison said, “I am greatly saddened by the news of the passing of Judge Tabit. I have known and worked with Judge Tabit for 30 years. I know her to have been one of the best trial attorneys West Virginia has ever seen and I also known her as one of the finest judges that West Virginia has ever had. My sympathies clearly go to her very close family. My sympathies also to her colleagues.”

Justice Haley Bunn said, “I’m devastated by the loss of Joanna. She was a wonderful colleague on the bench, former colleague in private practice, and friend. My thoughts are with her family and the entire West Virginia legal community as we deal with this unexpected loss.”

“The Kanawha County circuit judges, magistrates, family court judges and their staffs, we all share the same sentiment – utter heartbreak,” said Chief Thirteenth Judicial Circuit Judge Tera Salango.

At the time of her death, Judge Tabit was chair of the Mass Litigation Panel, a member of the Juvenile Justice Commission, and a former member of the Business Court Division.

A Charleston native, Judge Tabit earned her bachelor’s degree in Business Administration from Marshall University in 1983 and her law degree from West Virginia University College of Law in 1986.

She began her legal career in 1986 as a personal law clerk to former Supreme Court Justice Thomas E. McHugh. Following her clerkship, she served as an assistant and then

as deputy attorney general of the Appellate Division in the Office of the Attorney General from 1989 to 1992 under the administrations of Attorneys General Roger Tompkins and Mario Palumbo. In 1992, Judge Tabit joined the law firm of Steptoe & Johnson PLLC, where she was a member attorney until October 2014, when she was appointed to the Kanawha County bench by Governor Earl Ray Tomblin. She was elected to the bench in 2016.

Judge Tabit also worked as an adjunct lecturer teaching summer appellate advocacy for the West Virginia University College of Law. She was active in professional and civic organizations. Among other things, she served as Co-Chair of the Campaign for Legal Aid of West Virginia, served on the board of directors for the YWCA of Charleston, chaired the Access to Justice Foundation, served as a member of the board of governors of the West Virginia State Bar, and served as a commissioner on the City of Charleston Human Rights Commission.

While in private practice, Judge Tabit was rated an AV lawyer by Martindale Hubbell and recognized by Chambers USA as a Leader in the Field with a specialty in commercial litigation. Additionally, she was recognized by The Best Lawyers in America and Super Lawyers in various practice areas. In 2009, Judge Tabit received the “Outstanding Private Practice Attorney” award presented by the Women’s Law Caucus at West Virginia University College of Law. She was also recognized as “Charleston’s Finest” by the Kentucky/West Virginia chapter of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation for her charitable work for the organization.

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