



Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

News

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Former Supreme Court Justice Larry Starcher Dies

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. – Larry V. Starcher, a retired Supreme Court Justice and Monongalia County Circuit Judge, passed away Saturday, December 24. He was 80.

“Justice Starcher devoted his life to public service, as a circuit judge, Supreme Court justice, and law professor,” said Chief Justice John Hutchison. “He was a mentor to many young lawyers, law students, and law clerks. His love for the law school was known to all. His monetary gifts were important, but his gift of teaching was the most important of all. He had an incredible work ethic and was a champion of many causes. He was a loyal friend to many and will be sorely missed. On behalf of my fellow justices, I send sincere condolences to his family.”

Justice Starcher was born at home in Calhoun County, West Virginia, on September 25, 1942, one of seven children born to Cleo Earline and Susie Starcher. He was raised in Spencer, in Roane County, and graduated from Spencer High School in 1960.

He earned his bachelor’s degree (1964) and his law degree (1967) from West Virginia University. Prior to being elected circuit judge in 1976, he served as an Assistant to the Vice-President for Off-Campus Education at West Virginia University, as Director of the North Central West Virginia Legal Aid Society, and as a private lawyer.

He served as circuit judge for 20 years, 18 as chief judge. While sitting as a circuit judge, Justice Starcher served as a special judge in 23 of West Virginia’s 55 counties. He presided over the trial of 20,000 asbestos injury cases and a six-month state buildings asbestos trial. As a trial judge, he was active in the area of juvenile justice, including establishing alternative learning centers for youths at risk and a youth shelter. He also pioneered the use of work release and community service as punishment for nonviolent offenders.

In November 1996, he was elected to a full twelve-year term on the Supreme Court of Appeals. He served as chief justice in 1999 and 2003, and he promoted action in several areas of judicial administration, specifically the Court Facilities Committee, Public Trust and Confidence in the Judiciary, Mental Hygiene Commission, Court Technology Summit, Self-Represented Litigants Task Force, State Law Library improvements, and he reactivated the Gender Fairness Task Force.

In 2004, in partnership with the Mountain State Bar, West Virginia's historic minority bar association, Justice Starcher and his senior law clerk, Thomas Rodd, initiated the J.R. Clifford Project, a series of statewide community programs and publications based on the life and work of J.R. Clifford (1848-1933), West Virginia's first African American lawyer.

He retired from the Supreme Court at the end of 2008 but continued working as a senior status judge by appointment. He also served as an adjunct lecturer at the West Virginia University College of Law until 2020, teaching pre-trial litigation and trial advocacy, and he advised the Lugar Trial Association. "He was beloved by his students," said Charles DiSalvo, Woodrow A. Potesta Professor of Law at WVU.

Justice Starcher held all offices in the West Virginia Judicial Association, including president in 1992-93. He was a regular instructor at judicial conferences and was honored by many civic and community groups, including the NAACP, Jaycees, and Trial Lawyers. In 1978, he was a Fellow of the National Endowment for the Humanities at Harvard University.

He is survived by his wife, the former Rebecca Wiles, and three children, Mollianne, Victor, and Amy. Molli is a graduate of the West Virginia University College of Law, Victor the West Virginia University School of Medicine, and Amy the West Virginia University Master of Public Administration program.

"I got to know Justice Starcher as a faculty member at the College of Law, where he generously shared his real-world courtroom experience with his trial advocacy students. His students, including my husband, benefitted from his vast experience and good humor in the classroom," said Justice Beth Walker. "Mike and I extend our sincere condolences to Justice Starcher's family."

"Justice Starcher rose from humble beginnings to serve in a wide variety of roles within West Virginia's legal community and judiciary," said Justice Tim Armstead. "He concluded his long and distinguished career by sharing his experiences with countless students. I express my sympathy to his family and friends at this difficult time."

"Throughout his 32 years of service as a Judge or Supreme Court Justice, Larry Starcher's idealism was a model for West Virginia lawyers and his fellow judges," said Justice William R. "Bill" Wooton. "Justice Starcher was a passionate advocate for everyone who needed a helping hand: children, the poor, victims of discrimination, the mentally ill and mentally challenged, those addicted to alcohol or drugs, and victims of physical, sexual and/or mental abuse. He was a strong believer that anyone facing criminal charges deserved a fair trial. On a personal level, he was an exemplary husband, father, and grandfather, and he was a dear friend and mentor of mine for over 50 years. Larry Starcher left an indelible mark on the legal history of West Virginia."

Justice C. Haley Bunn said, “Justice Starcher was a dynamic law professor who truly cared about his students and the WVU College of Law. He will truly be missed by generations of West Virginia attorneys.”

“I am so saddened to learn of Justice Larry Starcher’s death. He was my good friend for more than 50 years,” said former Justice Margaret Workman. “As an undergraduate student at WVU, I volunteered in his first Monongalia County campaign and later served as his colleague on both the circuit court and the Supreme Court. I have never known a person with greater compassion for poor people, working people, and minorities. Larry will always be remembered as a passionate voice for the voiceless. My thoughts and prayers are with Becky and all of their family.”

“Larry Starcher, Judge of the Circuit Court of Monongalia County (17th Judicial Circuit), was an outstanding jurist and champion for the people of Monongalia County and the state of West Virginia. May he rest in peace and his memory be a blessing to all who knew him,” said Monongalia County Circuit Judge Phillip D. Gaujot.

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