



# Supreme Court of Appeals State of West Virginia

## News

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### Margaret Workman Serves As Chief Justice One Last Time

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. – After more than 30 years as a judicial officer, including 24 as a Supreme Court Justice, Justice Margaret Workman sat as Chief Justice on the Supreme Court bench to hear arguments on Wednesday, the last oral argument docket of her last term in office.

In 1988 Justice Workman became the first woman elected to statewide office and the first woman elected to the Supreme Court. She previously had served seven years as a Kanawha County Circuit Court Judge. She resigned in 1999 to practice law in Charleston and was elected to the Supreme Court again in 2008. She chose not to seek re-election, and her current term ends December 31.

Justice Workman has served as Chief Justice five times. In honor of her last day on the bench, she served as Chief Justice one last time. "I appreciate that generous and kind offer," Justice Workman said. "After 31 years, I'm ready for retirement. But it is an honor to sit here again."

At the end of the argument docket, the Justices each thanked Justice Workman for her service to the state and for her leadership and mentoring to newer Justices on the Supreme Court.

"Justice Workman has a long and dedicated career as a Kanawha County Circuit Judge and as a Justice of the Supreme Court of Appeals," said Chief Justice Armstead. "Her work on behalf of the children of our State has been remarkable. She has eliminated barriers and served as an example and encouragement to many young women. I have enjoyed her friendship and collegiality while serving with her on the Court and wish her the very best as she begins her well-deserved retirement."

Justice Jenkins said, "I have a deep respect and appreciation for the service she has brought to the court and the people of West Virginia. She will be sorely missed but her legacy will be felt for generations to come."

Justice John Hutchison recalled meeting Justice Workman when he was an attorney and appeared in her courtroom when she was a Kanawha County Circuit Judge, "I recognized you were a force to be dealt with. I was not surprised, based on my very first encounter with you, that you smashed the glass ceiling for women in the state of West Virginia."

When he was a Raleigh County Circuit Judge, Justice Hutchison said that circuit judges always "truly appreciated the support and the backing we got from you while you were Chief and even when you were not Chief. We knew as judges we could depend on Margaret Workman to have our backs."

Justice Walker said, “I have learned, as an entire generation of women lawyers in West Virginia have learned from you, as a mentor. I will always be thinking of you as I sit on this bench and as I have this honor.”

Justice Workman thanked the other Justices for their own work and leadership on the Supreme Court. “I appreciate you, and I respect each of you, and I am really grateful for the friendship and collegiality you all have shown to me.”

She said she asked Justice Walker earlier this year to promise to “watch out for children and preserve judicial independence. I am going to ask you all to do the same, and I know you will. Thank you for this honor.”

Justice Workman was born and raised in Charleston, the daughter of Mary Emma Thomas Workman and Frank Eugene Workman, a coal miner whose ancestors were among the first settlers of Boone County. The first in her family to go to college, she attended West Virginia University and West Virginia University College of Law.

After she received her law degree in 1974, she served as assistant counsel to the majority of the U.S. Senate Public Works Committee, whose chairman was Senator Jennings Randolph of West Virginia. She returned to West Virginia to work as a law clerk to the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit (Kanawha County). In 1976, she served as an advance person in the Carter Presidential Campaign, and she later worked on the campaign staff of U.S. Senator Jay Rockefeller. She then opened her own law office in Charleston.

In 1981, Justice Workman became the youngest circuit court judge in the state when then-Governor Jay Rockefeller appointed her to the Kanawha County Circuit Court. She served as a circuit judge until she was elected to the Supreme Court in 1988.

As Chief Justice in 1993 and 1997 she fostered a close working relationship between the court system and domestic violence programs, and she visited many shelters to learn how the court system could be more effective in addressing domestic violence. Justice Workman created the Task Force on Gender Fairness in the Courts and the Task Force on the Future of the Judiciary. She formed the Broadwater Committee, which made reforms in the court system's response to children's issues and spearheaded the development of rules governing child abuse and neglect cases.

In her tenures as Chief Justice in 2011, 2015, and 2018, she focused on improving the judicial system budget process, rehabilitation services for juveniles, and magistrate court facilities. She established the Adjudicated Juveniles Rehabilitation Commission, now the Juvenile Justice Commission, which monitors juvenile facilities and works to improve rehabilitative services.

Justice Workman has been active in church and community activities. She is the mother of Lindsay, Chris, and Ted Gardner and the grandmother of Lilly Elizabeth and Emily Faith Gardner.