



Supreme Court of Illinois

CHAMBERS OF
JUSTICE RITA B. GARMAN

3607 North Vermilion Street
Suite I
Danville, Illinois 61832
Telephone: (217) 431-8928

This morning, I informed my colleagues that I have decided to retire from the Supreme Court of the State of Illinois, effective July 7, 2022. For nearly five decades, I have been honored to serve the people of Danville, Vermilion County, the Fourth Judicial District, and all of Illinois as a jurist at every level of our state's court system.

I have always considered it a privilege to do my part to help our community and our state. My perspective on the honor and value of serving stems from my family background. Growing up in the small farming community of Oswego, Illinois, my parents made education and service to others a priority. Dr. Sheldon and Ellen Bell taught my brother Sheldon, my sister Lynn and me the opportunities that education provides, as well as the importance of making an impact in our communities. I am forever grateful that my father was able to see me as a Circuit Court judge and my mother to witness my service as an Appellate Court Justice.

As I look back on my career, there were many uphill challenges. When I decided to become a lawyer, there were no women on either the Illinois Supreme Court or the Illinois Appellate Court, and very few women judges throughout our state. In my first-year class at the University of Iowa College of Law, there were only eight women. A professor once told me that he believed I was only there to "catch a husband" and should give up my seat to "a more deserving male candidate, who would have a family to support."

When I graduated in 1968, I had a difficult time getting hired as a lawyer, as there were simply not many women lawyers practicing. I was turned down for a number of open positions, once being told "I don't know what I would do with you because no one wants to talk to a woman lawyer." Today, I am proud that these opinions are a relic of the past. I am also pleased that 40 percent of Illinois lawyers are now women, and the number of women in many law classrooms outnumber men.

A highlight of my career came on Christmas Eve in 1974. My husband Gill and I were driving with our two-year-old daughter to Joliet, Illinois when an alert went out on WGN Radio – a

woman had been named judge in downstate Illinois. This was the moment when I learned I had been appointed as associate judge – the first woman judge in my circuit. It was a newsworthy event 48 years ago, and a life-changing event for all of us. I was one of eight women judges in the state of Illinois. In 2022, not only am I the longest serving woman judge in Illinois, but also the longest serving judge in the state.

I have great gratitude for the love and support of my family, which includes my late husband Gill, who was my rock through our entire life together, and our children Sara Doyle and Andy Garman. I am looking forward to spending more time with them, their spouses, John Doyle and Meredith Garman, and my five wonderful grandchildren – Kathleen and Griffin Doyle, and Samantha, Thomas, and Emily Garman. I am grateful that my sister Lynn Simmons has been a constant source of love and support.

Professionally, there are many wonderful people who have helped me immensely throughout my entire legal career. In particular, I want to thank Mary Hurley, who has been an incredible and gifted assistant for more than twenty years. I am also grateful for the 27 brilliant and dedicated law clerks who have given their time and insight to serve the law, as well as the many people who work in the judicial branch across our state. Finally, I have great appreciation for my marshals Gary Miller and Troy Hogren for providing their friendship and a secure and safe environment over many years.

I have been privileged to work with exceptional jurists throughout my career. At every level of the court system, the people of Illinois have benefitted from some of the sharpest legal minds and most dedicated public servants in the country, all of whom work diligently to ensure the laws of our state are administered in a fair and unbiased manner.

There is no doubt that I have had the role of a lifetime, a privilege to serve the people of the state of Illinois as a member of the court system at every level. But this is the right time for me to step back from my public role and allow someone else to assume this all-important position.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you and the citizens of Illinois.

Sincerely,
Rita B. Garman
Supreme Court of the State of Illinois