



**The Southwestern Law School Community Mourns the Loss of Trailblazing
Alumna, Civic Leader, and Philanthropist**

THE HONORABLE ARLEIGH MADDOX WOODS '53

Justice, California Court of Appeal (Ret.)

August 31, 1929–July 24, 2022

The Honorable Arleigh Maddox Woods, a trailblazer in the legal profession and the judiciary in California for more than six decades, passed away in Vancouver, Washington, on July 24, 2022, at the age of 92.

Justice Woods was a beloved, highly accomplished civic leader whose exemplary career of “firsts” as a lawyer, judicial officer, and legal educator reflected her extraordinary courage, determination, and intellect that enabled her to break down myriad racial and gender barriers, forever changing the face of the legal profession. As a distinguished jurist on the California Superior Court and Court of Appeal, and as an attorney and mediator, she presented a model of compassion, fairness, and integrity. She also provided invaluable leadership and vision to her alma mater, Southwestern Law School, for over 30 years as a member and chair of the Board of Trustees.

“My colleagues and I are greatly saddened by the news of the passing of Arleigh Maddox Woods, our wonderful colleague who served as an Associate and Presiding Justice of the Second District Court of Appeal and as the Administrative Presiding Justice of the District. She was a brilliant jurist whose warmth, humor, and grace were evident to all,” the Hon. Elwood Lui, Administrative Presiding Justice of the California Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District, remarked. “Arleigh was a tremendous role model, particularly for African Americans and women who desired to be lawyers and community leaders, as she was one of the first and struggled to gain recognition for herself and her peers in the bar. She achieved enormous success by quietly going about her business and performing her duties with dignity, compassion, and dispatch. She was also a dear friend who will be greatly missed.”

Justice Woods was born and raised in Los Angeles. After receiving her B.S. degree from Chapman College, she completed her J.D. degree at Southwestern and her LL.M. degree at the University of Virginia. At 22, she was the youngest woman, and the fourth Black woman, to be admitted to the California State Bar. She formed her own law practice before joining a firm that represented the United Auto Workers and several other large labor unions. Three years later, she was named a partner in the firm, then known as Levy, Koszdin & Woods, thus becoming the first Black woman in the United States to hold the position of senior partner in a major law firm.

In 1976, Justice Woods was appointed to the Los Angeles Superior Court. Three years later, when she became Supervising Judge of the Court's North Central District, she was the only woman to hold such an office at the time. When appointed Associate Justice of the California Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District in 1980, she became the first Black woman in the U.S. to serve as a justice on a state appellate court. Two years later, she was elevated to Presiding Justice of Division Four and was chosen by the Chief Justice to serve as Administrative Presiding Justice of the Second District from 1984 to 1987. During her tenure on the Appellate Court, she frequently sat as a Justice Pro Tempore on the California Supreme Court. Justice Woods retired from the bench in 1996 and went on to serve as one of the top mediators in California.

According to Darby Dickerson, President and Dean of Southwestern Law School, "Justice Woods was a woman of firsts who inspired attorneys, faculty members, and law students to believe that it is possible to break barriers, change systems and make lasting change. Her legacy will live on at Southwestern and will continue to inspire generations of law students."

Justice Woods founded the California Appellate Project of Los Angeles, a nonprofit corporation that provides counsel for indigent defendants. She also served on the boards of numerous professional and community organizations. She was the first woman to chair the California Commission on Judicial Performance, served on the Chief Justice's Special Committee on Court Congestion and the Committee on Gender Bias, and chaired the Budget and Personnel Committee for the Los Angeles Superior Court. Justice Woods was a member of the Judicial Council of California and vice chair of the Council's Advisory Committee on Judicial Performance Procedures. She was founding chair of the California State Habeas Corpus Commission and vice chair of the Constitutional Rights Foundation. She was a member of the advisory boards for the Bernard Witkin Institute and Providence Hospitals, served on the National Commission on Health and Safety Advisory Committee, and was a director of the Cancer Research Foundation of Southern California.

Justice Woods wrote several hundred published opinions while on the Court of Appeal; as an attorney, she published in the fields of legal medicine, consumer rights, industrial health and

safety, and legal ethics. She also co-authored the original Appellate Court Practice Manual for Law Clerks. Justice Woods frequently served as an instructor and guest speaker for the California Judicial College, the California Institute for Trial Advocacy Skills, the University of California at Los Angeles, the University of Southern California, and Southwestern Law School.

Justice Woods' numerous contributions to the legal profession and the community are reflected in the many honors bestowed on her by a variety of organizations. She was recognized as Appellate Justice of the Year by both the California and Los Angeles Trial Lawyers Associations, received the Bernard Jefferson Award for Judicial Excellence from the California Association of Black Lawyers, was inducted into the Langston Bar Association's Hall of Fame, and was honored by the Black Women Lawyers Association. The Los Angeles Basin Equal Opportunities League presented Justice Woods with its Life Commitment Award in the field of Labor Law, and both the National YWCA and the Westside Business and Professional Women's Association presented her with their Professional Woman of the Year awards.

A devoted alumna and treasure of the Southwestern Law School community, Justice Woods was appointed to Southwestern's Board of Trustees in 1986. When she was elected Chair of the Board in 1994, she was the first Black woman in the country to head a major law school governing board. She became Trustee Emerita in 2018. During her service for more than 30 years as a trustee, Southwestern reached tremendous institution-building milestones, including the acquisition, renovation, and adaptation of the historic Bullocks Wilshire building; the establishment of an extraordinary library; the creation of the state-of-the-art Julian C. Dixon Courtroom and Advocacy Center; the construction of the residence hall to create a true campus environment; the founding of the Donald E. Biederman Entertainment and Media Law Institute and the first Master of Laws degree in entertainment and media law in the country; the establishment of a dual JD/MBA degree with the Peter F. Drucker and Masatoshi Ito Graduate School of Management; the creation of new legal clinics and reinvigoration of the law school's public service program; the establishment of four new faculty chairs; and the recruitment of two Dean and Chief Executive Officers with stellar credentials and reputations.

Justice Woods and her late husband, William T. Woods '57, also created endowments at Southwestern for The Hon. Arleigh M. Woods and William T. Woods Chair and the Hon. Arleigh M. Woods Scholarship Endowment Fund.

Leigh H. Taylor, Dean Emeritus and Professor of Law, who worked closely with Justice Woods for more than two decades, commented, "Remarkable does not begin to describe Arleigh. An extraordinary lawyer, judge, and civic leader, she served so effectively as the chair of our Board of Trustees and was a wonderful leader. We traveled together and shared so many good times.

But most of all, Arleigh was my very dear friend, and I will miss her warmth, her wit, and her wisdom."

In recognition of her many contributions to the law school and the legal profession, Justice Woods was honored by Southwestern's Alumni Association as the first recipient of the Outstanding Judicial Officer award in 1987, and was named Alumna of the Year in 1995. She received an Honorary Doctor of Laws Degree from the law school in 2005.

According to Bryant Garth, also Dean Emeritus at Southwestern and Distinguished Professor Emeritus at University of California–Irvine School of Law, "All of Arleigh's pathbreaking professional achievements—including so many firsts—cement her place in the history of Los Angeles. But from my perspective as Dean at Southwestern, working with her as Board leader, I will never forget her extraordinary warmth, humor, and grace, which made every interaction with her special."

Justice Woods moved to Battleground, Washington, in 1996. She was preceded in death by William T. Woods, her husband of more than 60 years. She is survived by nephew Euclid L. Taylor, Jr. (wife BJ; son Dale).

A memorial service, to be led by Hon. Kathryn Doi Todd in honor of Justice Woods, will be held as a Zoom gathering on Justice Woods' birthday, Wednesday, August 31, 2022, at 5:00 p.m. PT. Registration is required and can be found at www.swlaw.edu/AMWMemorial.

Those wishing to donate in Justice Woods' memory may consider a gift to the Hon. Arleigh M. Woods Scholarship Endowment Fund at Southwestern Law School (contact Associate Dean Debra Leathers at 213.738.6814 or visit www.swlaw.edu/giving).

A video of a 2009 interview of Justice Woods by the California Appellate Court Legacy Project can be found online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGmlwrLpVKg> with a transcription of the interview at https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/Arleigh_Woods_6377.pdf.