



Supreme Court of Illinois

October 1, 2026

ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION TO HONOR FORMER CHIEF JUSTICE ANNE M. BURKE WITH LEIGHTON AWARD

The Illinois Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission is pleased to announce that it will honor Anne M. Burke, former Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court, for her outstanding career and contributions as a jurist. The presentation of the award will take place during a special session of the Illinois Supreme Court at 2 p.m. on October 9, 2026, in the Illinois Supreme Court Courtroom, 160 North LaSalle Street, Chicago. A reception hosted by the Illinois State Bar Association will follow the presentation ceremony.

She will receive The Honorable George N. Leighton Justice Award, which is given to a person whose career represents the highest standards of the legal profession and is dedicated to public service. In 2009, the inaugural award was given to its namesake, Judge George N. Leighton of the Northern District of Illinois. The ceremony will be livestreamed [here](#).

Justice Burke

Justice Burke served as a justice on the Supreme Court of Illinois from 2006 to 2022, including a three-year term as the court's Chief Justice from 2019 to 2022. In her role as Chief Justice, Justice Burke oversaw the Illinois Judicial Branch's management of the COVID pandemic, launched a listening tour hosted by the Illinois State Bar Association throughout the state to learn about issues on a local level, created a task force for the Illinois Courts to be prepared for the implementation of the SAFE-T Act to eliminate cash bail in the state, and oversaw the first judicial redistricting in 60 years.

During her time on the Illinois Supreme Court, Justice Burke participated in more than 1,100 cases and authored 164 opinions of the court, 64 dissenting opinions and 30 special concurrences. In *Hayashi v. Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation*, Justice Burke authored the opinion affirming the constitutionality of the professional regulation law that health care licenses can be revoked without a hearing for those convicted of criminal battery against a patient. Justice Burke was the lone dissenter in the 2013 case, *People v. Martinez* regarding double jeopardy. In a 6-1 decision, the Illinois Supreme Court ordered a new trial for Esteban Martinez with Burke dissenting, arguing that since "the jury was impaneled and sworn, and jeopardy attached, the State may not re prosecute a defendant for the same offenses." Martinez appealed the case to the United States Supreme Court, which, in a per curiam decision, agreed with Burke's dissent.

Justice Burke was instrumental in creating the Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission, which serves to preserve the history of the Illinois judiciary. As the Supreme

Court's liaison to the Capital Development Board, she pushed for a major restoration of the 100-year-old Supreme Court Building in Springfield. While much of the work was done behind the walls with new HVAC, plumbing, and electrical systems, conservators also restored original paint colors and cleaned priceless works of art within the building.

Born and raised on Chicago's South Side, Justice Burke started her career teaching physical education at the Chicago Park District. There she took part in a new program that offered children and young adults with mental and physical differences the opportunity to learn the skills to participate in sports. She championed the idea of a city-wide competition that ultimately led to the creation of the Chicago Special Olympics in 1968, which grew to become the International Special Olympics, reaching tens of millions of people from 192 nations across the globe.

She married attorney Edward M. Burke in 1968, and they are the parents of five children and grandparents of nine. She graduated from DePaul University in 1976. Four years later, she enrolled in the Chicago-Kent College of Law. Graduating in 1983 at the age of 40, she obtained her law license and opened a neighborhood law practice focusing on cases of child neglect, abuse, delinquency, and custody.

In 1987, Governor James Thompson appointed Burke as the first woman to serve on the Illinois Court of Claims. In 1994, she left the Court of Claims to become special counsel for the state's Child Welfare Services. In 1995, Burke was appointed a justice on the First District Appellate Court, and the following year won election to the seat. In addition to her work on the Appellate Court, Burke led a national lay watchdog panel established by Roman Catholic bishops at the height of the clergy abuse crisis in 2002.

When Justice Mary Ann McMorrow announced her retirement from the Supreme Court in 2006, Burke was selected to fill the vacancy. In November 2008, Burke won election to a 10-year term and was retained in 2018. In June 2014, Burke presided over two same-sex wedding ceremonies, the first member of the Supreme Court to marry same-sex couples.

Justice Burke is a member the American Bar Association, the Catholic Lawyers Guild of Chicago, the Celtic Legal Society, the Chicago Bar Association, the Illinois State Bar Association, the Lincoln Academy of Illinois, and many other organizations.

On the occasion of her retirement from the Illinois Supreme Court, Justice Burke said, "I have deep respect for the many jurists and legal professionals with whom I have been privileged to serve throughout my judicial career. I am thankful for the tremendous work they do to keep our legal system fair, equitable, and of the finest quality."

Illinois Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission

The Illinois Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission was established in 2007 to assist and advise the Supreme Court of Illinois in acquiring, collecting, preserving, and cataloging documents, artifacts, and information relating to the Illinois judiciary. The Commission has produced a number of museum exhibits, events, and publications to educate the public about the legal history of the State of Illinois.

(FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: John Lupton, Executive Director of the Illinois Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission at 217.670.0890)