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RETIRED NAVAJO NATION JUSTICE LORENE B. FERGUSON PASSES

The Judicial Branch of the Navajo Nation sends condolences to the family and friends of retired Navajo Nation Supreme Court Associate Justice Lorene B. Ferguson. Justice Ferguson passed away peacefully on March 1, 2021, with her daughters at her bedside, from post Covid-19 complications. As the country celebrates March as National Women's History Month, the Judicial Branch acknowledges the trailblazing contributions of Justice Ferguson to the justice system of the Navajo Nation and to the education of numerous law students.

Justice Ferguson was one of the first women justices on the Navajo Nation Supreme Court, having been nominated to serve as Associate Justice by former President Kelsey Begaye in 2001 and confirmed by the Navajo Nation Council. She served as Associate Justice of the Supreme Court from 2001-2007 and was appointed as Acting Chief Justice of the Supreme Court from 2004-2005. Prior to her appointment as Supreme Court Justice, she served as the Navajo Nation Circuit Court Judge starting in 2000, working out of the Kayenta District Court, and as a Navajo Tribal Court Judge, from 1992 to 2000, assigned at different times to the Shiprock, To'hajiilee, Ramah and Alamo Courts. She came to the Navajo Nation Judicial Branch after having served as a Staff Attorney at the Navajo Nation Department of Justice for eight years. While at the

Department of Justice, she drafted the first Navajo Election Code and Navajo scholarship policy for the Department of Education, according to a statement by her family.

She graduated from Fort Lewis College in 1965, majoring in English Literature with a minor in Psychology. Thereafter, she worked in the areas of community development, welfare rights and Native American education as a Head Start teacher and Indian Education training technician, before attending the University of New Mexico School of Law, where she graduated in 1983.

According to her family, Justice Ferguson served as a Judicial Education Faculty Member for the National Judicial College at the University of Nevada in Reno and was also the first tribal judge to serve as Judge in Residence at the University of Tulsa School of Law in 2006. She was often invited to law schools across the country, including the University of Oregon, University of Colorado-Boulder, and Harvard University, to name a few, for speaking engagements as well as to hold oral arguments with the rest of the Supreme Court in an effort to educate law students on the importance of tribal traditional law.

Justice Ferguson served as a mentor to countless law clerks and Navajo attorneys throughout her career. She was a strong advocate for education and traditional law. To her family, her most important and meaningful accomplishments were as wife, mother, grandmother, and matriarch for her family. Her family said that Justice Ferguson would want to encourage every Navajo citizen to stay safe and get vaccinated.

“The Judicial Branch sends condolences to a pivotal member of the Judicial Branch of the Navajo Nation. We pay our utmost respect for our nat’áanii as someone who exemplified the best of our Navajo people. She was a role model for her serious thinking on complex issues and the responsibility she took in being a Supreme Court justice. She was also well-known across Indian Country for her work in the legal field,” said Chief Justice JoAnn B. Jayne.

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