

Press and Outreach Update: April 13, 2026

Press
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ SJM 8006 Washington State Legislature▪ February 2, 2026 court announcement of retirement of Washington Supreme Court Justice Barbara A. Madsen
LLLT Statistics
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Active LLLTs: 68▪ Emeritus Pro Bono: 1▪ Inactive LLLTs: 13▪ Suspended LLLTs: 3▪ Voluntarily resigned: 10
Upcoming Meetings/Events
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ May 11, 2026, TBD, Hybrid Meeting with the Court▪ June 1, 2026, 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. Remote Meeting▪ September 14, 2026, 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. Remote Meeting





Washington Courts: News and Information

Washington Supreme Court Veteran Justice, Barbara A. Madsen, Announces Retirement February 02, 2026

Washington Supreme Court Justice Barbara A. Madsen, the first woman to join the court by popular election in 1992, has announced her retirement effective April 3, 2026.

Re-elected five times, Madsen served as the Court's chief justice from 2010 to 2017. She was the first woman to be selected by fellow justices to serve two terms as chief justice. She was a longtime chair of the Washington State Gender and Justice Commission, overseeing its groundbreaking work on gender bias in the justice system.

Madsen currently is co-chair of the Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care, and chair of the Judicial Information System Committee overseeing statewide technology development in Washington courts.

"I never imagined I would have the honor of being a justice of the Washington Supreme Court. I leave this position now with immense gratitude and humility for the opportunity to be part of the fabric of this great state," Madsen said in her letter to Governor Bob Ferguson announcing her retirement.

"My commitment to the rule of law and to the future of our outstanding judiciary remain as strong as the day I assumed the role of judge 38 years ago. I will continue to contribute in different ways because I believe it is time to pass the gavel, making way for new ideas and the next generation of great judges."

Madsen's current term expires in January 2029. Her position on the Court will be filled by appointment from Governor Ferguson, and that appointee would need to run for election to the remainder of Madsen's term to retain the seat.

Madsen is a Renton native and graduate of the University of Washington and the Gonzaga School of Law. She started her legal career as a public defender in King and Snohomish counties and in 1984 she was appointed Special Prosecutor for the City of Seattle, where she developed the child abuse component of Seattle's Family Violence Project. Mayor Charles Royer appointed her to the Seattle Municipal Court bench in 1988, where she was twice elected Presiding Judge and worked to increase opportunities for women and attorneys of color to receive appointments as pro tem judges.

In 1992 Madsen ran for election to the Washington Supreme Court, sometimes campaigning with her four young children in tow. Madsen's decision to run for the Court came after watching hearings confirming Clarence Thomas's appointment to the United States Supreme Court and witnessing gender bias the Senate's treatment of Anita Hill, the primary witness in those hearings. Madsen recognized similar bias in Washington's legal profession. She believed that change would come only by adding new voices to Washington's highest court, which oversees the state's legal profession and court system.

"I ran for the Supreme Court because that is where decisions about justice, the justice system, and the legal profession were being made for my state," she said. "The system needed a close look at itself and how it treated women and people of color. That could only happen with diverse perspectives in the room."

In 1998 she became chair of the state's recently established Gender and Justice Commission, which worked to eliminate gender bias in the justice system and the legal profession, conducted ground-breaking research, promoted education and created resources for judicial officers on gender-based violence such as the Domestic Violence Manual for Judges, and much more. She chaired the Commission for more than 20 years.

As Chief Justice, Madsen championed creation of the limited license legal technician rule (LLLT) in Washington, the first of its kind in the nation aimed at expanding representation for people unable to afford lawyers or to navigate the legal system alone. She also led the development of Washington's Tribal State Court Consortium, which brings tribal and state judicial officers together to learn from each other and discuss justice issues affecting both.

In 2020, Madsen received the prestigious Joan Dempsey Klein Award from the National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ). The award recognizes someone who works to improve the number of women serving as judges, assists women judges in increasing their proficiency, and who supports improvement in the judicial branch.

Madsen was nominated for the award by state Supreme Court Chief Justice Debra Stephens, retired Chief Justice Mary Fairhurst, and Justices Susan Owens, Sheryl Gordon McCloud and Helen Whitener.

Justice Madsen "personally recruited most of the Washington judges who are or have been members of NAWJ," their nominating letter said. She played an important role in developing The Judicial Institute, which mentored and trained women and persons of color to seek judicial positions in Washington, and the Initiative for Diversity, which asks lawyers and legal employers to commit to hiring and promoting women and people of color in their workplaces.

"Her personal courage and commitment have inspired many other women to stand up and take leadership roles, and to extend a hand to others to join them," her colleagues said in their nominating letter.

Raised in unincorporated King County, Madsen is a lifelong resident of Washington state. She and her husband, Donald, have four children. Her daughter, Hillary Madsen, is a current King County Superior Court Judge.

"I am immensely grateful and humbled by the chance to speak for justice. I have the greatest respect for the Supreme Court as an institution, and I leave knowing the Court is in the capable hands of our Chief Justice, Debra Stephens," she said. Of the Governor's recent appointment, Madsen said, "Colleen Melody's appointment to succeed Justice Mary Yu gives me faith that my successor will represent the best of the legal profession."

Madsen plans to remain active in retirement, teaching, writing and spending time with her family. “There are so many people to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. My sincere thanks to the people who taught me and supported me on this amazing journey.”

RECORDS

Case Records
Caseload Reports
Court Dates
Judicial Information System (JIS)
JIS LINK
Odyssey Portal
Records Requests

RESOURCES

Civic Learning
Court News
Court Program Accessibility
Digital Accessibility
Jury Duty
Procurement Opportunities
Resources, Publications, and Reports
Self Help
State Law Library
Whistleblower Policy

QUICK LINKS

Court Closures and Emergency Modifications to Operations
Court Forms
Court Opinions
Court Rules
Protection Order Forms
Emergency Procedures
eService Center
Pattern Jury Instructions

TRANSLATIONS

中文形式/Chinese
한국어서류/Korean
Русский/Russian
Español/Spanish
Tiếng Việt/Vietnamese

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FILE FOR A PROTECTION ORDER



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To get started, turn this card over for more information.

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- Spousal support
- Parenting plans
- Parentage and paternity actions
- Civil protection orders arising from a family law matter
- Relocation actions for parents
- Agreed and default minor guardianships

A LLLT is licensed for *limited* family law practice

A LLLT is not a lawyer, but can:

- Provide legal advice
- Explain procedures
- Complete and file forms
- Assist with mediation



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FILE FOR DIVORCE OR LEGAL SEPARATION



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