



Judge Shirley L. Fulton

January 10, 1952 - February 8, 2023

Judge Shirley L. Fulton- Obituary

It is with heavy hearts that we announce the passing of Shirley L. Fulton, North Carolina Superior Court Judge, District 26, Ret.

Shirley passed Wednesday morning, February 8, 2023, with son Kevin by her side, having spent the final weeks of her life in hospice care at Asbury Health and Rehabilitation Center in Charlotte, surrounded by family, friends, and colleagues. Her room at Asbury, much like her former home at the historic Wadsworth House in West Charlotte, became a gathering place for those who loved and admired her, wanting to enjoy her soft-spoken words and her contagious sense of humor.

Shirley was born on January 10, 1952 to Margarett and Jacob Fulton of Kingstree, South Carolina. The second oldest of five siblings, she attended segregated schools in Kingstree, including an elementary school that had two classrooms. By the time Shirley completed 3rd grade, she had already mastered the 4th grade curriculum, so she was promoted to 5th. She went on to graduate from high school when she was 16 years old. With the encouragement of her mentor, one of the town's funeral directors, she gained admittance to North Carolina A&T State University as an undergraduate in the fall of 1968.

Shirley took time off from college in 1971, was briefly married, and gave birth to Kevin Goode, her only child, in 1972. To support Kevin, Shirley took a job as a clerk at the Register of Deeds in Guilford County, where she was exposed to lawyers for the first time. That exposure left her enchanted with the law. She returned to A&T with renewed focus and graduated in 1977, with a B.S. in Business Administration.

Shirley was admitted to NC Central University School of Law in 1977, the same year that Kevin started kindergarten. After her first year at Central, and with prodding from one of her professors, Shirley was admitted to Duke University School of Law as a transfer student, where she graduated with her J.D. in 1980. While attending Duke, Shirley needed to earn money to support Kevin so she taught at Durham Technical Community College

and clerked at the law firm of Loflin and Loflin. Her youngest sister Rosalind came to live with her to help with Kevin, which was a godsend.

Upon graduation from law school, Shirley worked briefly in private practice but decided her heart was in the public sector. She interviewed with District Attorney Peter Gilchrist and was hired in 1982 as the first black female assistant district attorney in Mecklenburg County. During her interview, Peter asked Shirley where she wanted to be in 10 years; she answered that she wanted to be a Judge. Peter told Shirley they would work together to make that happen; he was true to his word. Peter would later observe that hiring Shirley was one of the best decisions of his career.

In 1987, after 5 years in the district attorney's office, Shirley was appointed as a District Court judge. Shortly after, she ran successfully for the Superior Court bench, becoming the first black female superior court judge in the state and would later become Senior Resident Superior Court Judge. She presided as a judge for 16 years, retiring in January of 2003.

Lawyers who appeared before Judge Fulton have remarked on her keen listening skills; on her firm yet compassionate exercise of judicial authority; and on her civility, professionalism, and thoughtful leadership that raised the bar for lawyers and judges alike.

Shirley continued in the practice of law after leaving the bench and was one of the founding partners of Tin Fulton Walker and Owen. In 2001, she purchased the Wadsworth House in the Wesley Heights Community and restored it into a gathering place for civic, political, and social events on Charlotte's West Side. Her work helped energize a revitalization effort in Wesley Heights. She received a Charlotte Historic Preservation Award for these efforts. She later formed Fulton Consulting and last practiced with the Singletary Law Firm.

Shirley served as Chairperson of the Charlotte Housing Authority Board of Commissioners; she was Chair of the Juneteenth Festival of the Carolinas Board of Directors for 10 years; Co-Chair of the United Agenda for Children in Mecklenburg County; and past President of the Mecklenburg County Bar. She also served on the Charlotte Mecklenburg Public School Foundation and the Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools Task Force.

Shirley's awards are numerous and have included the Governor's Order of the Long Leaf Pine in 2010; the North Carolina Supreme Court Justices' Professionalism Award in 2015; the North Carolina Bar Association's Legal Legends of Color Award in 2018; the NCBA Citizen Lawyer Award; the NC Association of Women Attorneys Judge of the Year Award;

the NC Charlotte Woman of the Year Award; the Urban League Whitney Young Award; the NAACP Legal Defense Fund Award; the Charlotte Black Pages USA Lifetime Achievement Award; and the 2023 McMillan Distinguished Service Award to be presented posthumously by the NC State Bar.

In addition to raising a wonderful son, Shirley was proudest of her work as a mentor for young people. She helped countless young lawyers excel in the practice of law and supported the candidacies of people of color in seeking judgeships and other positions of leadership in the community. Most important to Shirley was her work as a mentor at Bruns Avenue Elementary where she developed a competitive program for black female students supported by a grant from Foundation for the Carolinas, linking these young students to mentors, taking them on trips to Raleigh, introducing them to powerful people of color across the state, and exposing them to experiences that she hoped would change the trajectories of their lives much like Shirley's mentors helped her to envision a higher platform from which to impact the community.

Shirley was no stranger to cancer, the disease that finally took her life. While on the bench, she was diagnosed with breast cancer twice. Told by doctors that her disease was incurable, she would battle and defeat the illness both times. Her fight against breast cancer decades ago, and her recent fight against abdominal cancer, are a testament to Shirley's courage, to her commitment to move past obstacles to make an impact in the world, and to her love for life and the people who surrounded her.

Shirley is survived by her beloved son, Kevin Goode, his wife, Ginger; grandchildren Kennedy and Dominic Logan; brother Jacob Fulton and wife Mary; sisters Linda Fulton and Rosalind Hayes; and nieces and nephews Alisa Hayes, Stephanie Fulton, Toshebia Henryhand, Joe Fulton, and John Moore. She is also survived by many wonderful friends including Helen Kirk, Butterfly, and Pape Ndiaye. The family especially appreciates dear friends Mary, Sis, and Becky.

Visitation will be held Saturday, Feb 11, 2023, from 1-5 pm at A. E. Grier & Sons Funeral Home, 2310 Statesville Avenue, Charlotte, NC. A Celebration of Judge Fulton's life will be held at Jane M Smith Memorial Church at Johnson C Smith University on Sunday, Feb 12, 2023 beginning at 2 pm with a reception to follow in Grimes Lounge in the Student Union building. In lieu of flowers, please make a donation in Judge Fulton's memory to Johnson C Smith University online at <https://www.jcsu.edu> or call 704-378-1020.

Previous Events

Public Viewing

FEB 11. 1:00 PM - 5:00 PM (ET)

A.E. Grier & Sons Funeral and Cremation, LLC.
2310 Statesville Avenue
Charlotte, NC 28206
info@aegriersonsfcc.com
<https://www.aegriersonsfcc.com>

Memorial Service

FEB 12. 2:00 PM (ET)

Jane M. Smith Memorial Church
100 Beatties Ford Road
Charlotte, NC