

Former NC Supreme Court Justice I. Beverly Lake Jr. Passes Away

Firm News

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Former North Carolina Supreme Court Chief Justice I. Beverly Lake Jr. died Thursday, September 12, 2019.

Justice Lake joined Nexsen Pruet's Raleigh, North Carolina office in 2011.

"The entire Nexsen Pruet family is greatly saddened by the passing of Justice Lake," said Leighton Lord, Chairman of Nexsen Pruet. "For all of us, he was a pioneer, mentor and friend. We are honored that Justice Lake spent the end of his illustrious career with the firm and we will miss him greatly. Our thoughts and prayers are with Justice Lake's family, friends and all those who were touched by his inexhaustible pursuit of truth and justice."

Known as a "law-and-order conservative," Justice Lake's distinguished career spanned five decades and included vast public service. He served on North Carolina's Supreme Court for more than 12 years, leading it from 2001 to 2006. In 2002, while serving as Chief Justice, he began the effort that would create the North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission, the first of its kind in the nation.

According to *The Associated Press*, "Lake was chief justice when a string of high-profile wrongful convictions in North Carolina caught his attention. In 2002, he convened a commission of defense attorneys, prosecutors, law enforcement officials and others to review how innocent people are convicted and how to free them. '**We need to make sure that we don't convict an innocent person — and if we do, to catch it fairly quickly,**' Lake said in 2002. '**The ultimate object of any court process is to find the truth. I think we can do some good. And I think North Carolina can take the lead on this.**' The study by Lake's commission led to the establishment of the N.C. Innocence Inquiry Commission, modeled after a panel in Britain. Its work has resulted in exonerations of 12 people since it was established in 2006. A judge exonerated three other men based on the commission's work."

In a statement, North Carolina Chief Justice Cheri Beasley said, "I was saddened today to learn of the passing of former Chief Justice I. Beverly Lake, Jr. After a lifetime of service to the people of North Carolina, he founded the Innocence Inquiry Commission, which has had a profound impact on our justice system, as well as championing other improvements to our court system in his role as chief justice."

Justice Lake served two terms in the North Carolina Senate, as Assistant and Deputy Attorney General for the Department of Justice, as Legislative Liaison for Governor Jim Martin, as a Special Superior Court Judge and as an Intelligence Staff officer for the United States Army.

While a State Senator, the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research ranked him as one of the ten most effective in the General Assembly. Justice Lake was the state Republican Party's nominee for Governor in 1980 and he led the Tarheel delegation to the the GOP's National Convention that year.

"As a North Carolina Superior Court Judge, Supreme Court Justice, Legislator and attorney, Justice Lake was a great public servant who always tried to do what was in the best interests of the people of North Carolina," said Dan Boyce, Nexsen Pruet Member, who joined Nexsen Pruet in 2011 with Justice Lake. "And to many of us, he was also a cherished colleague and friend. Justice Lake leaves behind a legacy that will be remembered by North Carolina attorneys and citizens for decades. We certainly will miss him, but we will never forget the legacy he left behind."

Justice Lake leaves behind a vast legacy as one of our nation's leaders on criminal justice reform. His work, which has already touched so many lives, will continue to benefit the people of his beloved North Carolina and the nation, as a whole.

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