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DC Superior Court Announces the Passing of former Chief Judge Ugast

WASHINGTON, DC – The Superior Court of the District of Columbia announces that former Chief Judge Fred B. Ugast passed away the evening of April 6, 2016.

Fred B. Ugast, a native Washingtonian, was appointed as an Associate Judge of the DC Superior Court on November 26, 1973 by President Richard Nixon. He served as presiding judge of the Criminal Division from July 1981 to June 1986. On June 2, 1986 he was appointed Chief Judge, succeeding H. Carl Moultrie I.

“Judge Ugast was an outstanding jurist and an incredibly capable leader. His contributions to the DC community – the courts, the justice system and the people of the District – are tremendous. He was an incredible man who lived a life of honor, dedication and generosity. Judge Ugast was genuinely liked and admired by judges, attorneys, parties and court staff alike. He will be sorely missed by everyone at the DC Courts,” said Chief Judge Lee F. Satterfield.

Judge Ugast received his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from The Catholic University of America, and his LL.B degree from Harvard Law School. He began his legal career in 1950, as a trial attorney in the Lands Division of the US Department of Justice. He later served as Special Assistant to the Attorney General, and held leadership roles in the Criminal Section and Tax Division. He received the Department of Justice Sustained Superior Performance Award in 1961 and the Attorney General’s Award for Exceptional Service in 1971, the same year he was nominated for the Tom Clark Award for Excellence in Government Service.

While on the bench, Judge Ugast chaired many court committees, including the Sentencing Guidelines Commission which sought to develop objective criteria to reduce unwarranted disparity in sentencing; the Committee on Pretrial Mental Examinations; the Advisory Mental Health Rules Committee, a multi-agency panel addressing civil commitment issues; and the Juvenile Mental Health Committee, which he chaired. As Chief Judge from 1986 to 1994, he ran the Court with a steady hand and was an innovator in many areas, including the establishment of the first Drug Court, the Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division, and the Civil Delay Reduction Project, which substantially reduced delay in the processing of civil cases and made trial date certainty a reality. He also implemented the One Day-One Trial rule, which reduced the amount of time DC residents spend serving jury duty.

During his tenure with the Superior Court, Judge Ugast received several significant awards from local and national bar associations which include:

- The Distinguished Fellow Award in 1978 presented by the Superior Court Trial Lawyers Association,

- The James C. Eastman Award in 1987 presented by the Bar Association of the District of Columbia,
- The National Bar Association 1990 Chairman's Special Award,
- The Bar Association of the District of Columbia 1990 Judicial Honoree Award,
- The National Association of Black Women Attorneys' Sadie T.M. Alexander Award in 1991,
- The Washington Psychiatric Society's Annual Recognition Award in 1981, and
- The National Center for State Courts' Distinguished Service Award in 1981.

In recognition of Judge Ugast's contributions to the advancement of care and treatment of the mentally ill, the District of Columbia Government designated a 30-bed diagnostic facility for mentally ill prisoners as the 'Judge Fred B. Ugast Forensic Psychiatric Center' in 1976. In 1987, when the Fred B. Ugast Forensic Psychiatric Center was closed, the District of Columbia established 'Chief Judge Fred B. Ugast Pretrial Examination Branch' at St. Elizabeths Hospital in the John Howard Pavilion.

Judge Ugast served on many community committees providing leadership to establish shelters and halfway houses for battered women, juveniles and others, as well as assisting to fund programs for school children in low-income neighborhoods.

Judge Ugast is survived by six children, and many grandchildren and great grand-children.

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