Honorable Judith S. Kaye (1938 – 2016)

Honorable Judith S. Kaye was an active member of the American Bar Association for over forty years, serving as a founding member of the 1994 ABA Presidential Task Force on Domestic Violence, and then of the Commission on Domestic Violence from 1994-1998.

Judge Kaye distinguished herself in private practice. Kaye joined the law firm of Olwine, Connelly, Chase, O’Donnell & Wyher in 1964. Two years later, Kaye became the firm’s first woman partner. Kaye excelled at Olwine, providing outstanding legal services while working to improve the legal profession and the administration of justice.

Judge Kaye made a lasting impression on the New York State Courts System. In 1983 with the election of Mario Cuomo as Governor of New York, Kaye, then a 44 year old private practitioner, was nominated and unanimously appointed by the State Senate as the first female judge to the New York State Court of Appeals. During her time on the court, Judge Kaye tirelessly committed herself to the work of the Court. After ten years on the Court, Judge Kaye was nominated to be the next Chief Judge. Kaye was again unanimously appointed by the Senate. During Kaye’s time as Chief Judge, she committed herself to victims of domestic and sexual violence. Judge Kaye created integrated domestic violence courts that enabled the court system to comprehensively address the many legal issues that domestic violence engenders. Judge Kaye remained on the court until 2008.

After her tenure on the court, Judge Kaye returned to private practice as Of Counsel at Skadden, Arps in the area of international arbitration.

Judge Kaye has over 200 published writings to her name. Judge Kaye was the recipient of the New York State Bar Association’s (NYSBA) Distinction in International Affairs’ Award, the NYSBA’s Distinguished Jurist Award, the NYSBA’s Gold Medal, the ABA Justice Center John Marshall Award, the National Center for State Courts’ William H. Rehnquist Award for Judicial Excellence, the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service’s Adoption Excellence Award, the New York Law Journal’s Lifetime Achievement Award, and New York University’s Law School Judge Edward Weinfeld Award.

Judge Kaye received her B.A. from Barnard College and her J.D. from New York University Law School. She was married to Stephen Rackow (d. 2007). Judge Kaye passed away on January 7, 2016 from lung cancer. She is survived by her three children.