

NEWS RELEASE

Contact: [Peter Allen](#), 415-865-7738

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Beth Jay, Principal Attorney to Three Chief Justices, Set to Retire

*Influential voice in the evolution of Supreme Court and judicial branch
issues for more than 30 years*

SAN FRANCISCO—Beth Jay, who has significantly influenced the administration of justice of California while serving as the principal attorney to three Chief Justices of California over more than 25 years of her 33-year career at the Supreme Court, will retire at the end of the year.

Her distinguished career has touched on wide-ranging roles dealing with access to justice issues—from gender equality in the bench and bar to adequate funding for the judicial branch to providing clear ethical guidance for judges through the Code of Judicial Ethics. Her administrative and policy responsibilities have included serving as the Supreme Court’s liaison to the Judicial Council, the State Bar of California, the State Bar Court, and the Commission on Judicial Performance. She has interacted regularly with the leadership of the Administrative Office of the Courts in areas including policy, budget, legal affairs, and legislative issues.

This year Jay was presented with the Access to Justice Award by OneJustice, a group that supports a statewide network of non-profit legal organizations. In 2010, the State Bar awarded her the prestigious Bernard E. Witkin Medal, which honors attorneys, judges, and legal scholars whose lifetime body of work has altered the legal landscape. She has been repeatedly named one of the 100 most influential lawyers in the state by the legal newspaper, *Daily Journal*.

Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye, who took office on January 3, 2011, said: “I entered upon my duties as Chief Justice of California at a pivotal time when the administration of justice and all that had been accomplished for the public seemed threatened by our statewide fiscal environment. Many decisions loomed, and Beth, who has a detailed recollection and encyclopedic memory of the history and internal workings of our complex judicial branch, has been an invaluable and trusted adviser to me during the last 23 months.

“All who know Beth can attest to her laser-like intelligence, her dedication to access to justice, her expertise in the death penalty process, judicial ethics, and the list continues. I can attest to those qualities and more; however, I will be forever grateful for her wise counsel and fidelity to

the cause of justice. And, although I will miss her energy, passion, and feistiness, I wish my friend all the greatest in her well-deserved retirement.”

The longest part of Jay’s service as principal attorney was spent working with Chief Justice Ronald M. George, who served from 1996 to 2010. “Beth Jay has been an invaluable resource for three Chief Justices of California, for the Supreme Court, and for the entire judicial branch during her more than three decades of exceptional public service,” George said. “Beth’s special blend of analytical and practical skills as my Principal Attorney always provided me with wise counsel. Her numerous talents and achievements are widely recognized by the judiciary and by the State Bar of California, which conferred upon her its esteemed Bernard E. Witkin Medal, which honors judges, attorneys, and legal scholars who, through a career of extraordinary service, have made a significant contribution to the quality of justice in our state. I join Beth’s many well-wishers in all three branches of state government in warmly expressing the great appreciation we all feel for her service to the statewide administration of justice in California.”

Jay also was praised by former Chief Justice Malcolm M. Lucas (1987–96). “Beth was invaluable,” he said. “I relied on her quite a bit. She was very smart, always fast, always responsive, and always efficient. She has been a fine public servant and deserves her retirement.”

Jay, a graduate of Vassar College and Stanford Law School, first engaged in private practice in San Mateo County. Within three years of joining the bar, she argued before the California Supreme Court and tried civil rights cases in the federal courts.

After serving as a staff attorney at the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, Jay joined the state Supreme Court in 1980 as a staff attorney, first to Associate Justice Frank Richardson, and then to Justice Lucas when he replaced Justice Richardson in 1984. When Justice Lucas became Chief Justice in 1987, Jay became a key advisor on policy and administrative issues affecting the court and the branch. Her work included joining with justices and judges in the reorganization of the Judicial Council to serve the branch and the public more effectively. In a related vein, she was a member of the search committee that eventually recruited William C. Vickrey to become the Administrative Director of the Courts in 1992. More recently, she served in a similar capacity in recruiting retired Judge Steven Jahr to serve as Vickrey’s successor.

Jay’s role expanded further under Chief Justice George, during an unprecedented period in which the judicial branch transitioned from county to state funding, the trial courts became unified into a single level of court, and court facilities transferred from local to state control. Over the years, she has served on numerous Supreme Court, Judicial Council, and State Bar committees studying such issues as judicial ethics, professionalism, multi-jurisdictional practice, accreditation of online law schools, publication of Court of Appeal decisions, providing competent counsel to death row inmates, and attorney discipline and admissions.

During the challenging times that have confronted Chief Justice Cantil-Sakauye, Jay continued in her role as principal attorney, providing background, analysis, and advice, and as multi-faceted liaison on behalf of the Chief Justice and the Supreme Court.

In addition to her work with the court and the judicial branch, she served as President of the Edward J. McFetridge Inn of Court in 2001–2002 and remains on its board. She was selected by the United States District Court for the Northern District of California to serve as an attorney representative from 2003 to 2006. She also served on the OneJustice Advisory Board developing a series of hearings held statewide to illuminate the need for increased resources for legal services and the courts.

Commenting on her retirement, Jay stated: “I have had the best job in the business for more than 25 years. The opportunity to serve with three extraordinary Chief Justices, and to work with so many other remarkable jurists, attorneys, and staff in every aspect of my service has been a true gift. I have had a ringside seat from which to watch California’s judicial branch mature and focus on the administration of justice and access to justice for all—and to contribute to the development of a truly statewide judicial branch that can really make a difference in people’s lives. Each of the Chief Justices has brought his or her own skills and intelligence to bear on the courts’ fundamental role in serving the people of California, and it has been exciting and inspiring to work so closely with each of them and to be able to learn so much. For me, a strong impartial judicial branch is an essential key to a functioning democracy, and each of these Chief Justices and all those with whom I have worked most closely have held that as a core principle guiding all they do.

“I am leaving primarily to focus on addressing some long-standing health challenges that now require me to step back from the fray for at least a few months. After that time, I intend to evaluate and consider all my options, including returning to the court to serve in a less-than-full-time capacity if the Chief will have me and if I can be of service. I have dedicated my career to public service and to improving our judicial system and have been greatly privileged to have the opportunity to do so and to work day by day with so many wonderful and dedicated people. I thank each of them and especially the Chief Justices, associate justices, the Chiefs’ staffs, court staff, and others committed to justice in every aspect with whom I have worked so closely over the years.”

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