



UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

*Office of the District Court Executive*

COLLEEN MCMAHON  
*Chief Judge*

EDWARD A. FRIEDLAND  
*District Court Executive*



February 5, 2020

To: Members of the Bar

It is with a heavy heart, that the Southern District of New York advises you of, the passing of Senior Federal District Judge Deborah A. Batts on February 3, 2020. Judge Batts was the first openly gay Article III Judge.

Judge Batts was appointed to the SDNY by President Clinton in 1994. She received her undergraduate degree from Radcliffe College in 1969 and she graduated from Harvard Law School in 1972. Following law school, she clerked for SDNY District Court Judge Lawrence W. Pierce.

In 1973, Judge Batts became an associate at Cravath, Swaine & Moore. In 1979, she became an Assistant United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York in the Criminal Division. And, in 1984, Judge Batts joined the faculty at Fordham University School of Law and became an Associate Professor of Law in May, 1990. Judge Batts was a member of the CUNY School of Law Board of Visitors and the Board of Managers of the Havens Relief Fund Society.

In June 2001, Judge Batts was appointed Team Member of the Crowley Program on International Human Rights' Mission to Ghana to assess women's rights in inheritance.

In October, 2001, an oil portrait of Judge Batts by Simmie Knox, commissioned by the HSLA Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Alumni/ae Committee, was unveiled at and presented to Harvard Law School. From May 2004 to July 2006, Judge Batts was a Member of the Scientific Committee for the International Conference on LGBT Human Rights, in Montreal, Canada.

Judge Batts served Chairperson for the Second Circuit Judicial Conference in 2007-2008. She was also Chairperson of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Circuit History Committee and served on the Judicial Conference Committee on Defender Services from 2008-2014. Judge Batts and Judge P. Kevin Castel were Co-Chairs of the 225<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee.

While serving as a District Judge, Judge Batts oversaw a multitude of high profile cases, including the criminal trial of Mamdough Mahmud Salim, who was charged in the 1998 United States embassy bombings conspiracy, and the litigation regarding the publication of an unauthorized “sequel” to “Catcher in the Rye.”

Judge Batts also left a lasting legacy at the court beyond her work on the bench. Chief Judge Colleen McMahon put it best:

“Deborah Batts was a trailblazer in every respect: an openly gay African-American woman who became a United States District Judge after a distinguished career as a federal prosecutor and law professor. She will be remembered by her colleagues for her devotion to the work of the court, for her mentorship of a cadre of young lawyers of all backgrounds, and for her infectious smile and extraordinary collegiality. One her greatest contributions to the court was her last: oversight of one of our RISE (Re-Entry through Intensive Supervision and Employment) Courts, through which offenders could earn reductions in their period of supervised release in exchange for participating in a special rehabilitative program under intensive judicial supervision. Judge Batts’ devotion to these individuals and to their rehabilitation earned their loyalty and trust; it will be difficult to replace her.”

Magistrate Judge Ona T. Wang, a former Law Clerk to Judge Batts added:

“Clerking for Judge Batts was a unique opportunity to get to know the real person behind the trailblazer and the icon, and I will treasure the time we spent together during my clerkship and in the years after. Joining the bench in 2018 was like returning home. Judge Batts’ perspective has informed how I approached my career, how I balanced work and family and personal needs, and most of all, how to be a kind human being.”

District Judge P. Kevin Castel, on his former colleague, added:

“Judge Batts was much more than the many milestones that her service represents. She was a warm, people-oriented person. She cared about her friends and their lives. She liked to laugh and smile. She loved the “Mother Court” that she served for more than 25 years. She dedicated countless hours to celebrating its history. Judge Batts was open to giving a defendant a break in sentencing in the right circumstances but could also be tough when the facts required. My last conversation with her was the day before she passed and she was upbeat, optimistic, talking about happy times ahead. It is a deep personal loss and the litigants and bar of this Court have lost a wise judge.

Judge Batts is survived by her wife Gwen Zornberg, her daughter Alexandra McCown, and her son James McCown.