

The Chief Justice Ralph D. Gants Access to Justice Fund

A Collaboration Among

The Chief Justice Ralph D. Gants Access to Justice Fund Advisory Committee

Massachusetts Bar Association

Massachusetts Bar Foundation

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Access to Justice Fund Established in Honor of SJC Chief Justice Gants \$100K Raised Before Announcement

BOSTON, Mass. — A new fund will carry on the legacy of late Supreme Judicial Court (SJC) Chief Justice Ralph D. Gants by supporting initiatives to advance access to justice, racial equity and criminal justice reform in the legal system. [Donations can now be made](#) to the Chief Justice Ralph D. Gants Access to Justice Fund, a collaboration among the Chief Justice Ralph D. Gants Access to Justice Fund Advisory Committee (made up of Chief Justice Gants' family and close friends), the Massachusetts Bar Association (MBA) and the Massachusetts Bar Foundation (MBF).

Until his unexpected passing on Sept. 14 at age 65, Gants had devoted his six years as chief justice to ensuring that the court system worked for people of all backgrounds and income levels. A longtime co-chair of the Massachusetts Access to Justice Commission, Gants led many efforts to expand the availability of counsel for individuals unable to afford representation, and to demystify the legal process for pro se litigants.

As head of the Massachusetts judiciary, Gants was also deeply committed to ending racial disparities in criminal justice, an issue recently brought to the forefront in a Harvard Law School study that he commissioned four years ago. In addition, after the May 2020 death of George Floyd sparked a nationwide movement for racial justice, Gants and his SJC colleagues issued a letter urging legal professionals to help eliminate systemic barriers to universal equity under the law.

Known for his unwavering compassion, Gants believed in a holistic approach to reducing recidivism and in taking steps to enable a successful transition for people leaving the prison system and reentering society. Notably, through his work with the executive and legislative branches on the Justice Reinvestment Initiative, he played a major role in the state's 2018 enactment of sweeping criminal justice reform.

In the words of Gants' wife, Northeastern University School of Law Professor Deborah A. Ramirez: "Ralph wore his heart out trying to rid the criminal justice system of systemic racism, improve access to justice and implement criminal justice reforms. He knew that justice is a relay race. He ran out of time to complete his work, so we are asking you to help us pick up the baton and continue his race to create a fairer and more just system. The best way for us to honor him is to continue his work. This Fund is our way of doing that."

MBA President Denise I. Murphy, whom Gants appointed in January to serve as co-chair of the SJC Standing Committee on Lawyer Well-Being, said: “I had the distinct honor of working closely with Chief Justice Gants on one of the many important causes that he championed during his remarkable tenure of service. In the same way he sought to improve the working life of lawyers, he took needed action to help the legal system deliver on its promise of equal justice for all. The Chief Justice Ralph D. Gants Access to Justice Fund is a fitting way for us to fulfill his vision for change within the commonwealth’s courts.”

MBF President Richard J. Grahn added: “Chief Justice Gants was an inspiring champion for equal justice. His longstanding and tireless efforts were recognized recently when the Massachusetts Bar Foundation presented him with its Great Friend of Justice Award. Establishment of the Chief Justice Ralph D. Gants Access to Justice Fund is a meaningful tribute to him and will ensure his lasting legacy as a great friend of justice for all citizens of the Commonwealth. The MBF is honored to play a role in this important effort.”

The Advisory Committee was assisted by Mintz in establishing the Fund. To learn more about the Fund and make a donation, visit www.massbar.org/gantsfund.