



CHAMBERS OF  
**DIANE S. SYKES**  
CHIEF JUDGE

**UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS  
FOR THE SEVENTH CIRCUIT**

FEDERAL COURTHOUSE  
517 EAST WISCONSIN AVENUE, ROOM 721  
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN 53202  
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December 5, 2024

With heavy hearts, we announce the death of our colleague Circuit Judge Joel M. Flaum. He died on December 4, 2024, having served nearly 50 years on the federal bench. He was 88.

A native of Hudson, New York, Judge Flaum graduated from Union College and moved to Chicago, where he eventually enrolled at Northwestern University School of Law, earning a J.D. degree in 1963 and an LL.M. in 1964. He worked for several years as an Assistant State's Attorney in Cook County before moving to the Illinois Attorney General's Office, starting as an Assistant Attorney General and quickly rising to the position of First Assistant Attorney General. In 1972 he became a federal prosecutor, serving as First Assistant United States Attorney in the U.S. Attorney's Office in Chicago until 1975.

As a county, state, and federal prosecutor, Judge Flaum participated in more than one hundred criminal trials and argued three cases in the United States Supreme Court. In December 1974 President Gerald Ford appointed him to the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. He began his service as a district judge in January 1975 at the age of 38—at the time the youngest federal judge in the nation. Judge Flaum served on the district court until President Ronald Reagan elevated him to the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals on June 1, 1983.

Judge Flaum was an active-duty circuit judge for more than 37 years. He assumed senior status in November 2020 and continued to serve the court of appeals as a senior judge until his death. In his 41 years as an appellate judge, he authored more than 2,000 published opinions covering virtually every subject within the jurisdiction of the federal courts—all of them learned, thoughtful, and well-crafted. Judge Flaum also held many leadership positions within the federal judiciary. He served as Chief Judge of the Seventh Circuit from August 2000 to November 2006. In connection with that

position, he held a seat on the Judicial Conference of the United States and was also a member of the Conference's Executive Committee. Later he served on the Conference's Judicial Conduct and Disability Committee.

In addition to his judicial work, Judge Flaum taught law students for many years as an adjunct professor at Northwestern. He also served for 11 years as a commissioned officer in the Judge Advocate General's Corp in the United States Naval Reserve.

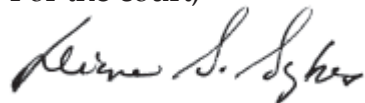
For his many contributions to the federal justice system, just last month Judge Flaum received the Opperman Foundation's Edward J. Devitt Distinguished Service to Justice Award, which annually recognizes an Article III judge for lifetime achievement in service to the nation's courts. Judge Flaum's other awards include the Order of Lincoln, Illinois's highest honor for outstanding individual achievement; the Chicago Bar Association's Justice John Paul Stevens Award; and the American Inns of Court Seventh Circuit Professionalism Award.

As reflected in his long and distinguished service, Judge Flaum was extraordinarily dedicated to the rule of law and cared deeply about maintaining a well-functioning, collegial, and independent federal judiciary. He was enormously generous with his time, talent, and sage advice for the countless judges and lawyers who regularly sought his wise counsel. He was an incomparable mentor to a legion of law clerks and was proud and delighted to see several of them appointed to the federal bench. He was a wonderful colleague and friend to those of us who were blessed to work closely with him. And above all he was a devoted husband, father, and grandfather.

Judge Flaum's lifetime of work—both on and off the bench—strengthened the judiciary, enriched our legal culture, and improved the administration of justice in our circuit and nation. We mourn his passing and extend our deepest sympathies to his family.

The court will hold a formal memorial service in the coming months.

For the court,



Chief Judge Diane S. Sykes  
United States Court of Appeals  
for the Seventh Circuit