

Press Release

Akerman Remembers the Honorable Joseph Woodrow Hatchett

May 3, 2021

It is with great sadness that Akerman mourns the passing of its former partner, the Honorable Joseph Woodrow Hatchett, who passed away on Friday, April 30, 2021 in Tallahassee.

“Judge Hatchett was a towering figure in the legal profession. Known for his compassion, wisdom, and keen legal intellect, he broke down barriers and was a man ahead of his time on issues of social justice and equality. He was a legal pioneer, a change agent, a proud Akerman Partner, and friend to all he knew,” said Scott Meyers, Akerman Chairman and CEO. “We are all tremendously grateful for Judge Hatchett’s lifetime of service. He leaves behind an extraordinary legacy that will continue to influence and inspire many generations to come.”

Judge Hatchett grew up in Clearwater, Florida and attended Pinellas High School. After graduation from Florida A&M University in 1954, Judge Hatchett was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the United States Army. He entered Howard University School of Law in 1956 and earned his LL.B. degree in 1959. After admission to the Florida Bar in November 1959, Judge Hatchett entered private practice, focusing on civil rights law in state and federal courts. In 1966, he was appointed assistant United States attorney for the Middle District of Florida, and, in 1967, he was designated first assistant United States attorney. In 1971, he was appointed United States magistrate for

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the Middle District of Florida, becoming the first Black federal judicial officer in the South.

In 1975, Judge Hatchett was appointed to the Florida Supreme Court, becoming the first Black Justice to serve on Florida's highest court. Governor Reubin Askew, who named Judge Hatchett to this position, said that of everything he did as governor, Judge Hatchett's appointment gave him the most satisfaction. In 1976, in electorally defending his seat on the Florida Supreme Court, Judge Hatchett became the first Black person to win a Florida statewide contested election in the twentieth century. In 1979, Judge Hatchett was appointed by President Jimmy Carter to the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, becoming the first Black person to serve in a federal circuit that covered the Deep South. Judge Hatchett served 20 years as a federal circuit court judge, becoming Chief Judge of the 11th Circuit from 1996-99.

Judge Hatchett retired from the bench in 1999 and became a partner at Akerman, where he chaired Akerman's Appellate Practice. His contributions to the firm were extraordinary. Judge Hatchett's arrival immediately raised the reputation of the firm and the Appellate Practice Group, leading to a series of high profile engagements. He was a counselor and confidant to many firm lawyers; and he served in the highest levels of leadership, helping to guide the firm to its national prominence.

Among many honors and awards recognizing his work and commitment over his career, notably the National Bar Association inducted Judge Hatchett into its Hall of Fame in recognition of his dedication to the cause of justice before the Courts of the United States of America. He was also awarded the Spirit of Excellence Award.

In February 2021, Judge Hatchett was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Florida Supreme Court Historical Society. The society honored Judge Hatchett, "in recognition of his highly

distinguished career as a lawyer, his many years of extraordinary contributions to Florida's Legal System as a highly respected member of the Judiciary, and his lifelong devotion to the improvement of the lives of others.”

About Akerman

Akerman LLP is a top 100 U.S. law firm recognized among the most forward thinking firms in the industry by *Financial Times*. Its more than 700 lawyers and business professionals collaborate with the world's most successful enterprises and entrepreneurs to navigate change, seize opportunities, and help drive innovation and growth.