

# Legendary Jenner & Block Lawyer Tom Sullivan Passes Away at 91

## News

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Thomas P. Sullivan, a legendary lawyer who crusaded for judicial reform, participated in some of the most significant legal and social issues of his time, and helped end the death penalty in Illinois, died on May 18. He was 91.

Except for four years as US attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, Mr. Sullivan spent his entire career at Jenner & Block, where he helped launch the firm's industry-leading pro bono program.

"Tom was a true giant of the legal profession and was pivotal in shaping our firm and many of the firm's current leaders. We are better and stronger today because of Tom's contributions, his courage and conviction, and his unbending integrity," said Tony Valukas, a senior partner and former Chair of Jenner & Block. "We will miss Tom dearly and are grateful for the mark he has left on the firm and on each of us who had the privilege to know him."

Mr. Sullivan joined Jenner & Block in 1954. With Albert E. Jenner, Mr. Sullivan represented William Witherspoon at the US Supreme Court in *Witherspoon v. Illinois*. Together, they persuaded the High Court that a state statute allowing the prosecution unlimited challenges to jurors was unconstitutional.

Reforming the death penalty became a mission. Mr. Sullivan was selected by Illinois Governor George H. Ryan to co-chair the governor's Commission on Capital Punishment to examine the administration of the death penalty in Illinois. Ultimately, the governor commuted sentences and cleared death row. His successor, Governor Pat Quinn, then signed legislation abolishing the death penalty in the state.

Mr. Sullivan also fought on behalf of scientist and cardiologist Dr. Jeremiah Stamler, who was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee's, which led to a limiting of the committee's powers and contributed to the abolition of the committee in 1975. He also fought on behalf of four of the Chicago Seven defendants who were threatened with contempt before their famous trial began, and assisted with the successful appeal from their convictions. More recently he represented prisoners detained at Guantanamo.

As U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Illinois from 1977 to 1981, he began Operation Greylord, a probe into corruption in the Cook County criminal courts and led to the conviction of judges, lawyers and court personnel. The operation is regarded as the longest and most successful undercover operation in FBI history.

Though many of his cases were enmeshed in the politics of the time, Mr. Sullivan described himself as more concerned with taking a principled stand. "A person, no matter how awful he is, or how awful the crime he is accused of committing, is entitled to the full panoply of the law and the Constitution," he said in an interview with *Super Lawyers* in 2008.

In the same publication, Jeffrey D. Colman, a longtime friend and partner at Jenner & Block, said Mr. Sullivan accomplished all that he did without flash. "He's not someone who wows the jury with a booming voice, his suit and tie and shiny shoes," Mr. Colman told the publication, but he had "an amazing ability to cut through what people call BS and get to the true legal and factual issues that a judge or jury see as critical."

Mr. Sullivan grew up in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, a western suburb of Chicago. He graduated from Immaculate Conception in 1947 and then enrolled at Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa. In the first semester of his second year, he took a course in constitutional law. He was inspired. After that, he transferred to Loyola University Chicago School of Law, graduating in 1952.

At the time, the nation was embroiled in the Korean War. Mr. Sullivan enlisted and spent a year after basic training at Fort Bliss, Texas. He spent about nine months in the Fort Bliss Legal Office, serving as a clerk typist. Arriving in Taegu as the war was ending, Mr. Sullivan was placed in the Korean Military Advisory Group, again as a clerk typist. While there, he started a school of English conversation. As a result of knowing the people of Korea, he sponsored a young Korean woman, Anna (Che) Lee, to attend college in Chicago. Her descendants still live in the United States.

Out of the service, he began to look for a job. He interviewed with a few firms, including Johnson, Thompson, Raymond & Mayer, which later became Jenner & Block. A law school professor at Loyola knew Mr. Jenner and recommended Mr. Sullivan. He started in the fall of 1954, the firm's 30<sup>th</sup> lawyer, earning \$300 a month.

Mr. Sullivan counted as his closest friend Prentice Marshall, a colleague at Jenner & Block who later became a federal judge. It was through Mr. Marshall that Mr. Sullivan became involved with the Chicago Bar Association's Defense of Prisoners Committee. The committee was designed to supplement the public defender in felony cases out of the criminal court at 26<sup>th</sup> Street.

As Mr. Sullivan said, working on behalf of an indigent defendant was a great training ground for trying cases.

Later, while serving on the governor's commission, Tom became interested in police procedures regarding the accuracy of custodial confessions. He trained paralegals and young associates at

Jenner & Block to make cold calls to police departments all over the country and inquire about their methods, and made hundreds of such calls himself. As he gathered information, he approached chiefs of police in towns, cities, and state legislatures, convincing them to acknowledge the benefits of recording custodial interrogations. He gave speeches in various forums, including the International Chiefs of Police Convention, and he testified in many state legislatures. Today 25 states record custodial confessions.

Mr. Sullivan was a devoted husband, father, and grandfather. He is survived by a loving family: his wife, Anne Landau, children Tim, Maggie, Liza, and Mimi, and grandchildren.

“Tom was a great man and a great lawyer. He lived, breathed, and exemplified our values and led the way in making Jenner & Block what we are today – zealously devoted to our clients and an extraordinary contributor to our nation through the pro bono program that he helped create,” said Jenner & Block Co-Managing Partner Randy Mehrberg.

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