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LDF Mourns the Loss of Judge Richard H. Dinkins, Pioneering Advocate for Civil Rights

The Legal Defense Fund (LDF) is deeply saddened by the passing of Judge Richard H. Dinkins, a groundbreaking civil rights activist, attorney, and judge who also frequently served as a cooperating attorney with LDF. He died at 71 years old on October 1, 2023.

“We honor the memory of Judge Richard Dinkins, a renowned civil rights advocate, attorney, and judge, and we extend our deepest condolences to his loved ones. As a gifted jurist and pioneering advocate for racial justice, Judge Dinkins’ critical work to end desegregation and address employment discrimination in his home state of Tennessee powerfully reverberated,” said LDF President and Director-Counsel Janai Nelson. “As a legal architect for social change in both private practice and on the judicial bench, including as a cooperating attorney with LDF for many years, Judge Dinkins broke barriers to equality with extraordinary dedication and resolve. He leaves behind an indelible legacy and will be sorely missed.”

Judge Richard H. Dinkins was born in Nashville, Tennessee, where he was inspired at an early age to advocate for civil rights, including by his father, the late Reverend Charles L. Dinkins, Sr., who served as a pastor and the president of the NAACP’s Nashville branch. Judge Dinkins completed his undergraduate degree at Denison University in Ohio before returning to his hometown to pursue his law degree at Vanderbilt University in 1977. He then went on to become a lead attorney on Nashville school desegregation cases and several other civil rights cases.

As a cooperating attorney with LDF for many years, Judge Dinkins worked on several school desegregation and employment dockets, including *Elliot v. University of Tennessee* (1986) and *Monroe v. Madison County Board of Education* (1987). After leaving private practice, Judge Dinkins served as a Chancellor in Davidson County from 2003 to 2008 and then as the first Black judge of the Tennessee Court of Appeals, serving on the bench from 2008 to 2022. During his tenure, Judge Dinkins authored numerous appellate opinions and heard a multitude of cases on civil rights law.

Recognized for his lifelong career in civil rights advocacy and service, Judge Dinkins was honored with the Nelson C. Andrews Distinguished Service Award from the Nashville Public Education Foundation, the William M. Leech Jr. Public Service Award from the

Tennessee Bar Association, and the Freedom Fighter Medal from the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education.

Judge Dinkins is survived by his children, grandchildren, and a host of family and friends.