

Expression of Condolence for The Honourable Roy McMurtry by Toronto City Council

Moved by: Mayor Olivia Chow

Seconded by: Councillor Jamaal Myers

The Mayor and Members of Toronto City Council are deeply saddened to learn of the passing of the Honourable Roland “Roy” McMurtry, Order of Canada, Order of Ontario, King’s Counsel – former Chief Justice of Ontario – who passed away on March 19, 2024, at the age of 91.

Roy McMurtry was born in Toronto in 1932 and attended school at St. Andrew’s College. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree from Trinity College at the University of Toronto and earned his Bachelor of Laws degree from Osgoode Hall Law School.

Mr. McMurtry was a trial lawyer for 15 years before being elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in the 1975 provincial election until 1985. He served as Ontario’s Solicitor General from 1978 to 1982 and was then appointed as Ontario’s Attorney General, a position he held until 1985. In this role, he reformed Ontario’s legal system, including pivotal changes in family law and played a key leadership role in implementing bilingualism in the courts system.

In the early 1980s, he played a central and influential role in patriating Canada’s Constitution, which also included the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. He helped broker a deal where the provinces agreed to proposed reforms that paved the way for Canada to fully take control of the Constitution from the United Kingdom in 1982.

In 1985, Mr. McMurtry was appointed as Canada’s High Commissioner to the United Kingdom. He served in this role until 1988 and resumed his law practice upon his return to Toronto. After serving as a judge, he was appointed as Chief Justice of Ontario in 1996. This appointment made him one of only two Ontarians to have been both Attorney General and Chief Justice in this province.

In his role as Chief Justice, Mr. McMurtry helped build a more inclusive society by promoting cultural diversity, defending the constitutional rights of minority groups, and creating educational initiatives for youth. He also helped create Pro Bono Ontario, which continues to champion free legal services for marginalized communities to this day. Under Mr. McMurtry’s leadership, the Ontario Court of Appeal made a landmark decision when it ruled that excluding same-sex couples from obtaining a marriage

licence was a violation under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The decision made Ontario the first jurisdiction in Canada to legally recognize same-sex marriage in 2003.

In his later life he served as the Chancellor of York University from 2008 to 2014 and became a published historian as the President of the Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History in 2019. Throughout his life he was the recipient of many awards and honours including the Order of Ontario in 2007, the Order of Canada in 2009, and in 2013, the G. Arthur Martin medal for his contributions to criminal justice. The Attorney General of Ontario building, the McMurtry-Scott Building, is partially named in his honour.

Mr. McMurtry leaves behind a legacy as a consensus builder and a visionary leader in his field who advocated for a more just and equitable society.

The City Clerk is requested to convey, on behalf of the Members of Toronto City Council, our sincere sympathy and deepest condolences to Mr. McMurtry's six children, 12 grandchildren, their families, and to all those he impacted throughout his life.

April 17, 2024