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Press Release

Retirement of the Honorable Carmen Consuelo Cerezo

SAN JUAN, PR (February 16, 2021) – Chief United States District Judge Gustavo A. Gelpí and the United States district judges for the District of Puerto Rico announce the retirement of Judge Carmen Consuelo Cerezo, after 40 years on the federal bench, effective February 28, 2021. At the time of her nomination by President Jimmy Carter in 1980, Judge Cerezo became the first Hispanic woman United States district judge in the entire federal judiciary. Another first came later, in 1993, when she became the first Puerto Rican woman to serve as chief United States district judge.

But the law is not Judge Cerezo’s only passion. The judicial robe which she has donned throughout the years bears testimony to a woman of unequalled strength in embracing the many roles she has chosen – wife, mother, and child of God. A woman who carries strong convictions softly, Judge Cerezo is known for her powerful intensity on the bench and in her opinions.

Perhaps Judge Cerezo’s training in classical ballet as a young woman – a discipline characterized by inspiration, focus, and strength— is the best symbol, a premonition, of the jurist that she would become. Judge Cerezo raised the bar for all practitioners in her courtroom as to knowledge of the law and ethical representation, always rising up to the toughest challenges herself: comprehensive knowledge of the law, firm character; indisputable probity; profound respect for the jury system; and, scholarly command of the rules of evidence.

Those who have shared time with Judge Cerezo in less formal settings know about her profound love of Puerto Rico, her deep love of family, and her down-to-earth sense of humor. A woman of strong and resolute religious beliefs, Judge Cerezo described Vieques’ plight as a Navy bomb practice range as “a silent prayer for peace before the Holy Sacrament” recusing herself from participating in the cases brought against protesters in the early 2000s.

For Immediate Release

Judge Cerezo's understanding of the essence of the fundamental right to equal treatment under the law is her lifeblood –the respect with which she approaches all cases no matter their degree of difficulty or their high publicity-- all litigants not only demand but deserve equal protection. Social upbringing or disadvantage, a privileged or poverty-stricken background, religious beliefs, political class, race, gender, any and all other labels to be thought of – none have ever mattered in Judge Cerezo's courtroom. The Boricua Popular Army militant Filiberto Ojeda, the protection of voters' rights despite their inactive status, the victims of the Humberto Vidal tragic explosion, and every single litigant in Judge Cerezo's courtroom felt her respect.

"The right to identify our own existence lies at the heart of one's humanity." This quote, taken from Judge Cerezo's groundbreaking opinion recognizing that transgender persons have the right to define their own identities, embodies her judicial mantra, eulogizing those who face and overcome difficulties when taking "the steps to the courthouse to demand what is due." Judge Cerezo has dedicated her life to those who are brave to seek justice combining, as St. Thomas Aquinas, the faith and logical reasoning which ultimately come from God.

Judge Cerezo is courage defined in many hues: her dreams, the glass ceilings she broke, her accomplishments as a judge and jurist, her leadership by example, her tender love for her late husband Benny Frankie Cerezo, her devotion to her children Rossana and Francisco Javier, her grandmotherly pride for Sara Gabriela, her humanity.

We bid farewell to Judge Cerezo as she embraces her retirement from the bench. Her substance and legacy will forever remain in the halls of justice of the United States District Court for the District of Puerto Rico.

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