Former Florida Justice Ben F. Overton, 1926-2012

TALLAHASSEE -- Former Florida Supreme Court Justice Ben F. Overton died Saturday, December 29, in Gainesville, Florida, of complications from heart surgery. He was 86 and was Florida's 62nd Justice since statehood.

"Justice Overton was one of the most influential members of the Court after the sweeping reforms of the 1970s," said Chief Justice Ricky Polston. "He will be remembered not only for his far-seeing opinions but also for his efforts in the 1970s to make the state courts more accessible by allowing cameras into our courtrooms."

In the mid-1970s, Overton was one of several newly appointed Justices who elevated the reputation of the Court after it earlier had become involved in scandal. He was the first Justice chosen through a merit selection process created by Gov. Reubin Askew that soon was added to the Florida Constitution by vote of the people.

From his appointment on March 27, 1974, until his retirement on January 4, 1999, Overton authored more than 1400 decisions and was a central figure in a vast series of reforms that made his Court one of the most respected and accessible in the nation. He served as Chief Justice from 1976-1978 and chaired the Article V Review Commission in 1984.

He not only helped make Florida one of the first states to allow television coverage of court cases, but also was instrumental in making the state Supreme Court one of the first in the world to have a website. Overton later played a pivotal role in seeing that every Florida Supreme Court case was televised, webcast, and stored in an on-line archive.

Born in Green Bay, Wisconsin, Overton attended the University of Florida and later received his
degree from its law school in 1952. He also earned an LL.M in jurisprudence from the University of Virginia in 1984.

Overton served nearly 10 years on the Pinellas County circuit court and, for several years, as its chief judge. He was well known for his work in legal education and dispute resolution and was Chairman of the Dispute Resolution Section of the American Bar Association. He was also an active adjunct professor of law at the University of Florida's Levin College of Law.

Predeceased by his wife Marilyn, Overton is survived by his children Judge William H. Overton, Robert M. Overton, and Catherine L. Overton; 2 grandchildren William E. and Brian H.; and one great grandchild, Adelynn.

Services will be held on Saturday morning, January 5, 2013 in Gainesville and Justice Overton will lie in state at the Florida Supreme Court on Monday, January 7, 2013. He will be interred in St. Petersburg, Florida on Wednesday, January 9, 2013.

Further details will be released when available.

[Attachment: Photo of Ben F. Overton]

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