

# Missoula County Media Release

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## **District Court Judge Karen Townsend Announces Retirement**

After serving nearly a decade on the bench, Fourth Judicial Court Judge Karen Townsend has announced she will retire this summer.

Townsend, the first woman elected as district court judge in Missoula County, informed Montana Supreme Court Justice Mike McGrath this week that she intends to step down Aug. 30.

“I have been blessed with wonderful fellow judges in the district and across the state as well as a staff that is second to none,” Townsend wrote in her letter to McGrath. “I will miss the work and the colleagues, but the time has come to pass the torch.”

Townsend presided over thousands of cases during her tenure, including family law, civil and juvenile criminal cases. She is perhaps best known for presiding over the Jordan Johnson rape trial, in which he was found not guilty, and the Mountain Water condemnation case, in which the City of Missoula acquired ownership of the city’s water system.

Townsend was first elected as District Court judge in 2010 and re-elected in 2016. Prior to her election, she spent much of her legal career with the Missoula County Attorney’s Office, which included serving as the chief deputy county attorney from 1998 to 2006. Following retirement as a county attorney, she served as special deputy county attorney for Beaverhead, Sanders and Glacier counties on criminal prosecution matters.

A member of the State Bar of Montana and the American Bar Association, she’s received numerous accolades over the years, which include being named Western Montana Bar Outstanding Lawyer, Super Lawyer for the Northwest Region, and as an American College of Trial Lawyers fellow. In 2017, the State Bar of Montana honored her with the Karla Gray Access to Justice Award, and Court Appointed Special Advocates of Missoula named her the CASA Judge of the Year in 2019.

Townsend also is the director of the Trial Advocacy Program at the Alexander Blewett III School of Law at the University of Montana and has coached the program’s competition team since 1998. In 2017, the law school honored her with a Distinguished Service Award for her work with program.

In addition to her work in the legal profession, Townsend has also volunteered for many community organizations, serving on the boards for Big Brothers Big Sisters, Saint Patrick Hospital Community Ministry, YWCA, Missoula Correctional Services and the Montana Human Rights Commission. She also served as the first female president of the Kiwanis Club of Missoula.

The state Judicial Nomination Commission is tasked with nominating candidates to fill vacant District Court judgeships. The governor then selects a nominee, who must be confirmed by the Montana Senate.

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