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Former Criminal Appeals Court Judge Jimmy Fry Dies

Was Also Former Limestone County DA and Director of Legal Services Alabama

MONTGOMERY, Ala. – The Alabama District Attorneys Association is sad to announce that former District Attorney Jimmy Fry, who also served on the Alabama Court of Criminal Appeals, died Monday night following heart surgery. He was 68.

Fry, a native of Athens, was district attorney for Limestone County from 1982 to 1999, when he was appointed to the Court of Criminal Appeals. He was an associate judge on the court from 1999 to 2001. Fry also served as executive director of Legal Services Alabama before retiring from that organization in 2016.

As a district attorney, Fry was an active member of the Alabama District Attorneys Association. He held several leadership positions in the ADAA, including secretary-treasurer, vice president and president.

Barry Matson, executive director of the ADAA, said Mr. Fry was a dedicated lawyer, prosecutor and jurist.

“Not only were we well-acquainted professionally, I also consider Jimmy a good friend. I’ve known him my entire career,” Matson said. “He served on our Executive Committee for many years and in every position on the board. He worked tirelessly to promote the interest of prosecutors, victims and the citizens of the state of Alabama.

“We all were extremely proud when he was appointed to the Court of Criminal Appeals,” Matson added. “We are truly heartbroken by his death.”

Mike O’Dell, the district attorney for Cherokee and DeKalb counties, is one of few current DAs who served at the time with Fry in the 1990s. He has known Fry nearly 40 years.

“Jimmy was a great guy and an outstanding prosecutor,” O’Dell said. “He was innovative and very personable. He was a tremendous asset to the association.”

O'Dell and other former colleagues remember Fry for his sense of humor. "He was a cut-up, but he could be serious when he had to be," said O'Dell.

"He was one of those people who were fun to be around," said Bill Baxley, a former lieutenant governor, attorney general and district attorney who served in the National Guard with Fry.

"He was one of the best prosecutors we ever had in this state," Baxley said of Fry. "He tried some of the biggest cases in Alabama. He was sent all over the state to try the big cases. He had really good judgment and could readily assess things."

Former Jefferson County District Attorney David Barber worked with Fry in the DA Association and crossed paths with him when Fry was a JAG (judge advocate general) in the Guard and Barber a JAG in the Army Reserves.

"The first thing I think about Jimmy was his smile," Barber said. "He was an optimist and always saw things on the bright side."

Fry, he said, was a leader within the DA Association.

"I just appreciate his leadership," Barber said. "There are 42 DAs in Alabama, and anytime you are trying to manage an association and you have 41 other independent, strong-willed people from different areas, it takes a lot of leadership to make it work. Jimmy handled it well."

After he left the Court of Criminal Appeals, Fry worked 10 years with Legal Services Alabama, first as director for the southern region of Alabama and then as the state executive director. Birmingham attorney LaVeeda Battle served on the board of Legal Services when Fry was executive director and remembers him as an advocate for the less fortunate.

"He was totally dedicated to the mission of Legal Services," Battle said. "He was a strong advocate for people in poverty, especially people who needed legal services."

For the past several years, Fry served as a supernumerary district attorney in Montgomery. Supernumeraries are former or retired DAs who handle special cases the current DA can't.

Fry was a founding member of the Northwest Alabama Drug Task Force and former co-chairperson of the U.S. Attorney's Law Enforcement Coordinating Committee. He served on the Athens City School board, and was a founding member of the Children's First Foundation of Alabama.

The Alabama District Attorneys Association's membership includes the district attorneys of all 42 judicial circuits, the state attorney general and the director of the Alabama Securities Commission. The association promotes education and professionalism among prosecutors and advocates for a fair, just and effective criminal justice system.

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