

Pioneering WA Supreme Court justice to retire

Sep. 11, 2025 at 5:18 pm



“I have had the good fortune of serving the people of our great State as a judge for 25 years and have cherished every single moment of such service,” Washington Supreme Court Justice Mary Yu said in a Washington courts new release. (Nick Wagner / The Seattle Times, 2024)

By [Lauren Girgis](#)

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Washington Supreme Court Justice Mary Yu will retire by the end of the year after over 10 years on the state’s highest court.

Before she was appointed and elected to the state Supreme Court in 2014, Yu was a trial court judge for 14 years in King County Superior Court, where she performed Washington’s first same-sex marriages. During her tenure on the state Supreme Court, [Yu and fellow justices outlawed](#) the state’s death penalty; [found state law](#) criminalizing simple drug possession was unconstitutional; and [upheld the constitutionality](#) of the state’s capital gains tax. Yu is the first Asian, first Latina and first member of the LGBTQ+ community to serve on the state’s highest court.

"I have had the good fortune of serving the people of our great State as a judge for 25 years and have cherished every single moment of such service," Yu said in a Washington courts news release. "I was blessed with having extraordinary colleagues all along the way and so, it is not an easy decision to step away."

Gov. Bob Ferguson will appoint a new justice to fill Yu's position until the 2026 general election, when voters will determine who will fulfill the remainder of Yu's term expiring Dec. 31, 2028. A news release from Ferguson's office stated he is "immediately beginning a process to select a worthy successor."

"Throughout her time on the bench, Justice Yu has demonstrated her commitment to respect, dignity and fairness for all," Ferguson said in the release. "Her legacy is in bending Washington state further toward justice."

On Dec. 8, 2012, couples [lined up at the King County Courthouse](#) for Yu to perform Washington's first same-sex marriages in a marathon session. She estimates she's helped same-sex couples adopt about 1,300 children.

"She brought it back down to us. She said, 'This is about your love and your journey and your family. *That* is what we're here for,'" Emily Cofer, who was married by Yu to her wife Sarah during that 2012 marathon, told [The Seattle Times last year](#). "Yes, it's part of history. But she really wanted it to be about us and our relationship."

In 2021, she [briefly appeared](#) on the late-night show "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" as one of several "perfectly named people."

"When you do preside over weddings, do you say 'I, Mary Yu, marry you?'" Kimmel quipped.

Born and raised on Chicago's South Side, Yu was the first in her family to graduate from college. She earned her law degree from the University of Notre Dame and moved to Seattle in the '80s. Before attending law school, Yu worked in the Peace and Justice Office for the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Before becoming a judge, Yu served as deputy chief of staff to then-King County Prosecutor Norm Maleng and as a deputy in the prosecutor's civil and criminal divisions.

Yu has co-chaired the court's minority and justice commission, is a jurist in residence and teaches at Seattle University School of Law and served as the Seattle Girls' School mock trial judge for nearly two decades. In 2021, Seattle University established a scholarship fund in her name to aid underrepresented law school students, especially women of color.

Chief Justice Debra Stephens said in a statement that Yu has "served the people of Washington with passion, intellect and boundless energy."

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