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Foreword

The Honorable Denise Owens

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FOREWORD: TRIBUTE TO FRED BANKS

*The Honorable Denise Owens**

Many people know Judge Fred Lee Banks, Jr., as an amazing counselor and scholar, but I am honored to also know him as an amazing mentor and friend. A mentor can be defined as an experienced and trusted adviser; Judge Banks is the epitome of such. He is dependable, encouraging, and always willing to lend a hand where needed. His attitude and demeanor are always welcoming and warm, and he is quick to encourage and guide others when asked.

It is often said, “there comes a time when a bird must leave their nest,” but when birds leave their nest too early, they fly poorly, or not at all, because their wings are too small and underdeveloped. Judge Banks believed I was ready to leave the nest when he recommended me to take over representation of two of his major clients: Mississippi Association of Educators and Jackson Hinds Comprehensive Health. I was truly surprised and honored that he would think I had the mental and legal acumen to represent his clients just a few years out of law school. The phone calls of encouragement, the question and answer sessions, and the continued motivation and support allowed me to spread my wings and soar.

Over the years, I have been constantly appreciative and grateful for the continuous mentorship and support I receive from Judge Banks. Throughout my journey from a baby lawyer, to a baby Judge, to a seasoned Judge, he has fielded legal and ethical questions that I have thrown at him. This is just one example of Judge Banks’s selflessness and readiness to provide his distinctive insight and knowledge of the legal profession.

As a public servant and a man of great character, Judge Banks has served the State of Mississippi with honor, dignity, and respect. In 1975, Judge Banks was elected to the Mississippi House of Representatives and was twice re-elected. During his tenure, he served as Chairman of the House Ethics Committee, Chairman of the House Judiciary "B" Committee, and Chairman of the Legislative Black Caucus. He also served as Hinds County Circuit Court Judge and Mississippi Supreme Court Justice.

* Judge Denise Owens has served on the Hinds County Chancery Court in Jackson, Mississippi, since 1989. Prior to her Judgeship, Judge Owens was the Managing Attorney and Partner at Owens Law Firm, an Assistant City Prosecutor for the City of Jackson, and a Staff Attorney for Central MS Legal Services. Throughout her distinguished career, Judge Owens has served as an Associate Professor at several institutions of higher learning, including the University of Mississippi School of Law, Tougaloo College, Jackson State University, and Hinds County Community College. She has earned numerous awards and recognitions for her service to Mississippi’s Judiciary.

Judge Banks was (and is) the go-to person for advice and education on a plethora of legal issues, especially those involving ethics. He is your favorite lawyer's favorite lawyer, the person lawyers call when they need an ethical opinion. He is an "ethics guru."

Fred Banks, a civil rights attorney, says he chose to enter the law "to help African Americans achieve equality." As a teenager, I recall the discussion of my parents, family, and friends about the important and dangerous work that Fred Banks was doing in the area of voter empowerment, education equality, and civil rights. When I started practicing law, it was empowering to be able to look to him for advice.

That advice included the know-how to resolve conflicts and successfully conclude legal matters. So even though Fred Banks is probably best known as a Civil Rights litigator, I know him as a successful negotiator and resolver of conflicts—something which has made him a very sought-after mediator and arbitrator.

One thing he would not negotiate is his commitment to the NAACP. He is proud of his work with the NAACP spanning over 40 years. When he ran for the Supreme Court, my husband, Bob Owens, an attorney and one of his campaign coordinators, suggested he not put his NAACP affiliation in big bold letters on the front of his campaign literature because it was a majority-white voting district. Fred Banks refused to diminish in any capacity his commitment and support for the NAACP.

Judges, attorneys, and students alike can attest to the dedication Judge Fred Lee Banks, Jr., has put into his work over the years. I am honored to have had the opportunity to gain the one-on-one knowledge and guidance of such a distinctive trailblazer. I have no doubt that Judge Banks will continue to help future Judges and attorneys alike spread their wings and soar.