



U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Mourns the Passing of Former Commissioner Christopher Edley Jr.

May 17, 2024

The United States Commission on Civil Rights mourns the passing of former Commissioner Christopher Edley Jr. on May 10, 2024. Commissioner Edley served a six-year term as a congressionally appointed Commissioner of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights from 1999 to 2005. Commissioner Edley leaves behind a legacy of profound impact on civil rights, education, and public policy. His career spanned decades, serving in pivotal roles under three Presidents and significantly influencing national policy.

Commissioner Edley had a remarkable career in both academia and public service. After twenty-three years teaching at Harvard Law School, he accepted the deanship of the University of California, Berkeley School of Law. After stepping down as dean, he continued to teach at Berkeley until his death. He was at the forefront of debates on civil rights in education and government. During his deanship, he established policy-oriented centers and expanded opportunities for students pursuing public-interest careers.

His vision led to the creation of the Civil Rights Project with Gary Orfield, addressing critical gaps in civil rights research and policy. Commissioner Edley also co-chaired the congressionally chartered U.S. Department of Education's national Equity and Excellence Commission from 2011 to 2013. His expertise was instrumental in addressing education equity issues and shaping national policy. In 2015, Commissioner Edley co-founded The Opportunity Institute, focusing on education equity issues, and served as its President Emeritus. His efforts have left an enduring impact on education and civil rights advocacy.

"Christopher Edley Jr. was a transformative figure in the fight for civil rights and equality," said Rochelle M. Garza, Chair of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. "His contributions to public policy and academia have paved the way for countless individuals and will continue to inspire future generations."

Commissioner Peter Kirsanow, who served with Commissioner Edley, said, "Chris Edley left an enduring mark on the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, both in terms of his scholarship and his collegiality. His impact on civil rights will resonate for decades and his kindness and mentorship to those who had the privilege of serving with him will never be forgotten."

Commissioner Edley is survived by his wife, Maria Echaveste, a former advisor, and deputy chief of staff to President Clinton, and their children Elias and Zara, his son Christopher Edley, III, a grandson, and his sister, Judith Edley. His legacy as a passionate advocate for civil rights, an esteemed educator, and a dedicated public servant will endure.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights extends its deepest condolences to the Edley family and honors his extraordinary life and career.

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, established by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, is the only independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights and reporting annually on federal civil rights enforcement. Our 56 state Advisory Committees offer a broad perspective on civil rights concerns at state and local levels. The Commission: in our 7th decade, a continuing legacy of influence in civil rights. For information about the Commission, please visit www.usccr.gov and on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).