



Administrative Office of the Courts

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Two former justices honored by New Mexico Supreme Court

SANTA FE – The New Mexico Supreme Court honored former Justices Patricio M. Serna and Kenneth B. Wilson on Tuesday with the publication of commemorative volumes of opinions written during their tenure on the state’s highest court.

“Justices Serna and Wilson each contributed to the development of the law in New Mexico while serving on the Court. These commemorative volumes highlight their devotion to the rule of law and serve as a tribute to their distinguished legal careers,” said Chief Justice Julie J. Vargas.

Justice Serna, who lives in Santa Fe, was a member of the Court from 1996 to 2012. Justice Wilson served on the Court from December 1989 to November 1990.

Wilson was born in Texas and his career included working in oil fields, law enforcement, ranching and private business. He served as a New Mexico State Police Officer and decided to become a lawyer. He earned an undergraduate degree from Baylor University and a law degree from the university in 1974. He was admitted to the practice of law in Texas and New Mexico.

As a trial attorney in Roswell, Wilson specialized in civil, criminal and personal injury law. He was appointed to the Supreme Court in 1989 by then Gov. Garrey Carruthers. At the time, justices and judges were required to run for election in the next general election following their appointment if they wished to remain on the bench. Wilson lost his election bid in 1990, and returned to the private practice of law.

In the foreword to the compilation of Wilson’s opinions, retired District Judge Charles C. Currier highlighted the justice’s authorship of majority decisions on settlements in damage cases, the statute of limitations on medical malpractice claims, and interpreting the state’s criminal law against forgery.

“Although Justice Wilson’s tenure on the Supreme Court was short lived, his presence was, and is, still being cited by practitioners throughout New Mexico,” Judge Currier wrote.

Serna was born and raised in Catron County in southwestern New Mexico. He received an undergraduate degree from the College of St. Joseph on the Rio Grande, then served in the U.S. Army and worked as a probation and parole officer. He earned a law degree from the University

of Denver in 1970, and then a Master of Laws degree from Harvard Law School. He moved to Washington, D.C. and worked for the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

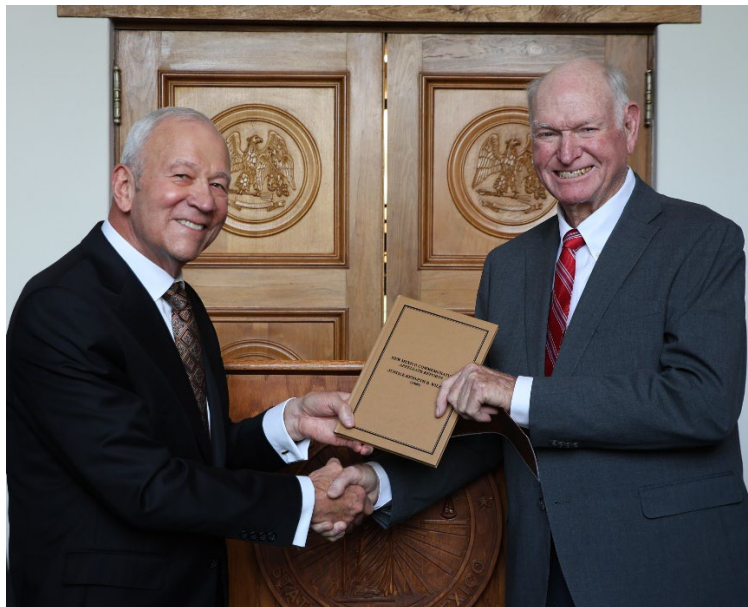
After returning to New Mexico in 1975, Serna worked in the attorney general's office and ran his own law practice. He served as a judge on the First Judicial District Court from 1985 to 1996, and won election to the Supreme Court in 1996. He was chief justice in 2001-2002.

“Justice Serna’s background inevitably led him to understand the law as the fabric binding our personal, familial, business, and governmental interactions that, when properly applied, would advance societal interests. He strived to apply the law fairly and equitably, and, consistent with his roots, compassionately,” retired Court of Appeals Judge James J. Wechsler wrote in the foreword to the volume of Serna’s opinions.

The compilation includes Serna’s majority opinions on the Inspection of Public Records Act, grand jury proceedings, water rights, and underinsured motorist coverage. Justice Serna also wrote the 1999 opinion that upheld the death sentence of Terry Clark, who two years later became the last person to be executed in New Mexico.

The Court has now published commemorative volumes of opinions of seven former justices, with the inaugural publication in 2022. [Previous volumes](#) honor the work of Justices Edward L. Chávez, Richard E. Ransom, Tony Scarborough, H. Vern Payne, and Joseph F. Baca.

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Former Justice Kenneth B. Wilson (on the right) receives a commemorative volume of his opinions from Justice Michael E. Vigil.



Retired Justice Patricio M. Serna (on the left) is presented a compilation of his opinions. Justice Michael E. Vigil made the presentation. (Photos courtesy of the Administrative Office of the Courts)