

## **Public Defender Charles L. Johnson, 1948 -2004**

Today we are mourning the loss of Charles L. Johnson, known to all as “Charlie ,” who served the Massachusetts Defenders Committee and the Committee for Public Counsel Services as a public defender from 1974 until his retirement in 2002. Charlie died on April 12 after a long illness. Having earned his undergraduate degree at Dartmouth College in 1970 and his law degree from Harvard University Law School, and having already spent the summer of 1973 as a student public defender intern, Charlie was hired by MDC in August, 1974. As his classmate in Professor Speer’s public defender training program, I soon came to like and appreciate this friendly and unassuming man.

After stints in the MDC Boston and Cambridge trial offices, Charlie returned to his Cape Cod roots when he transferred in 1981 to our Barnstable County office. As a member of that office, Charlie represented thousands of clients with humanity and professional skill . Bill Robinson has stated that Charlie was “universally respected in the courtrooms of Cape Cod[,]” and has praised the success of Charlie’s courtroom style as “smooth with understated theatrics .”

In the case of Commonwealth v. Martin, 417 Mass. 187 (1994), Charlie’s trial performance, combined with Attorney Speer’s appellate advocacy, produced the unusual and satisfying result of a reversal of convictions on serious charges due to the introduction over objection of irrelevant and prejudicial testimony, and an admonition for retrial concerning the closure of a portion of the trial to the public.

In 1997, the Massachusetts Bar Association recognized Charlie’s accomplishments for clients by honoring him with its Defender Award . In announcing his award, I stated that Charlie’s “persistent advocacy has earned a second chance for thousands of poor people charged with criminal offenses . . .over a score of years. Charlie is also a wonderful human being and colleague.” We were sorry to lose Charlie’s services and company when he took early retirement in March, 2002. We will remember him as a successful public defender, a friendly colleague, and as a person who dedicated his entire professional life to assisting the less fortunate among us.

April 16, 2004