

Bertha Wilson

The late Honourable Bertha Wilson was a native of Kirkcaldy, Scotland. After earning a Masters Degree from the University of Aberdeen, she emigrated along with her husband John Wilson, a Presbyterian minister, to Canada in 1949. During the Korean War, John served a six-year secondment as a naval chaplain in Halifax and Bertha enrolled at Dalhousie Law School where she graduated near the top of her class. She was called to the Nova Scotia bar in 1957, the Ontario bar in 1959, and joined the law firm of Osler Hoskin Harcourt in Toronto where she practiced for 17 years.

In 1975, she was the first woman appointed to the Ontario Court of Appeal. In 1982, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau appointed her to the Supreme Court of Canada making her the first female justice to serve on the Supreme Court. At the time of her death Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin, on behalf of the Supreme Court of Canada, stated: "Bertha Wilson was known for her generosity of spirit and originality of thought. She was appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada the same year the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was enacted. As a member of this court, she was a pioneer in Charter jurisprudence and made an outstanding contribution to the administration of justice. She will be sorely missed by all who were privileged to know her."

Eligibility

In honour of her exceptional contributions, the Bertha Wilson Honour Society at the Schulich School of Law seeks to recognize extraordinary alumni from across Canada for their contributions and/or achievements in their communities to:

- the legal profession
- legal education
- the judiciary
- business and industry
- non-profit or charitable organizations
- the arts, or
- other activities that have made an exceptional contribution to law or society

Requirements

- Both the **nominee and the nominator** must be an alumnus/alumna of the Schulich School of Law.
- The nomination package must contain the nominee's **CV** and at least **one letter of reference** outlining the candidate's contributions and/or achievements as defined above.
- Recipients of the Weldon Award for Unselfish Public Service and honorary degree recipients from Dalhousie University **are** eligible for nomination to the Bertha Wilson Honour Society.
- The candidate **cannot** be nominated posthumously.
- Self-nominations will **not** be accepted.
- Nominations are considered for **one year**. To be considered for a subsequent year, a new nomination package must be submitted.

Bertha Wilson Award Selection Process

1. A call for nominations will be sent out via email in January to all law school alumni, posted on the law school's website and shared on social media channels.
2. All nominations received by the Alumni Office are forwarded electronically to the respective DLAA Branch Presidents (BPs) for the region in which the nominees are located.
3. BPs review nominations and can choose to either:
 - a) put forward a nomination from those received, OR
 - b) put forward a nomination of their own (in which case all other nominations for that branch/province become 'residual')
4. All nominations, including residuals, are returned to the Alumni Office where they will be forwarded to the Selection Committee for review. This committee will consist of:
 - a past BWHS recipient
 - a recent graduate
 - a current or retired faculty member
 - a past-president of the DLAA
 - a member of the judiciary (including post-retirement)
 - a current member of the DLAA board
 - the Director of External Relations (or Alumni Relations, as a non-voting member)
5. The Selection Committee will meet and review each nomination selected by the BPs, and may also choose to add up to three additional recipients from either the pool of residual nominees, or by selecting new nominees.
6. The Selection Committee's finalized list of recommended recipients will be forwarded to the Dean for approval. The Dean will then call and congratulate each recipient.
7. A press release will be issued, and the list of recipients will be published on the law school website, shared on social media channels, announced at the alumni dinner, and featured in Hearsay.
8. Recipients will receive framed certificates and lapel pins at receptions planned for their region, or via courier.