

**A LEADING FIGURE
IN CANADIAN LAW.**



The Right Honourable Richard Wagner, P.C

Chief Justice of Canada

Biography:

Chief Justice of Canada since December 18, 2017. Judge of the Supreme Court of Canada since October 5, 2012.

The Right Honourable Richard Wagner is the 18th Chief Justice of Canada. In this role, he presides over the Canadian Judicial Council, National Judicial Institute and chairs the Advisory Council for the Order of Canada. Chief Justice Wagner was president of the Association des Cours Constitutionnelles Francophones from 2019 to 2022. The Chief Justice also fulfilled his duty to serve as administrator of the Government of Canada from January 23 to July 26, 2021.

Born and raised in Montreal, Chief Justice Wagner earned his Bachelor of Social Science and Licentiate in Laws at the University of Ottawa. He returned to his home town to practice law from 1980 to 2004. His areas of specialization included professional liability, commercial litigation and class action lawsuits. As a litigator the Chief Justice argued cases before every level of court in Quebec, quasi-judicial tribunals, as well as the Federal Court and the Supreme Court of Canada. Throughout his legal career, Chief Justice Wagner led initiatives to help lawyers constantly upgrade their skills and knowledge, such as the creation of the Centre d'accès à l'information juridique in 2002, for which he was awarded the Mérite du Barreau du Québec in 2005. In 2022, in recognition of his longstanding contribution to the advancement of the law, the Bar of Montreal awarded him its highest distinction, the Medal of the Bar of Montreal. In addition, for his outstanding contribution to upholding and promoting the rule of law, the World Jurist Association presented him with its Medal of Honor at a ceremony at the United Nations in New York in 2023. Most recently, in 2024, France awarded him with the insignia of Commander of the Legion of Honour, the country's highest decoration, for his exemplary services to the cause of justice.

Chief Justice Wagner was appointed a judge of the Superior Court of Quebec in 2004 and was named to the Quebec Court of Appeal in 2011. On October 5, 2012, he was appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada. He was sworn in as Chief Justice of Canada on December 18, 2017. At his Supreme Court welcoming ceremony, Chief Justice Wagner spoke of the need for more transparency in the justice system, "Judges and courts must adjust and must explain who they are, what they do and how they do it." In that regard, the Chief Justice works very closely with the Supreme Court Registrar. The Court has introduced plain language summaries of decisions called *Case in Brief* and produces an annual report called the Year in Review. The Chief Justice now holds an annual news conference and has directed the Supreme Court, for the first time in its history, to hear cases outside Ottawa. In 2019, it traveled to Winnipeg where it heard two cases and judges conducted activities in the community. The Court conducted a similar trip to Quebec City in 2022.

Chief Justice Wagner is a steadfast advocate for better access to justice for all Canadians. He encourages better funding for legal aid, urges lawyers to do more pro bono work and supports structural reforms to further modernize the justice system.

As a litigator and a judge, the Chief Justice has championed civility in and outside the courtroom, "Even if people reading our decisions don't agree with an outcome, we have to ensure they respect them. If we let emotion get the best of us, our decisions become suspect, and so do we." Civility and collegiality were the focus of his speech at the 2019 Cambridge Lectures.

A passionate defender of the principle of judicial independence, the Chief Justice and Minister of Justice David Lametti signed an Accord in 2019 to formally recognize the Supreme Court's full independence from the federal Department of Justice. "A judiciary that is independent – and seen to be independent – benefits all Canadians," said the Chief Justice.

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