



METRO ATLANTA

## Ed Buckley, top Atlanta civil rights lawyer, dies after cancer battle



Ed Buckley, a leading Atlanta-based employment and civil rights attorney, died this week after battling cancer. (Courtesy)

**By Rosie Manins**

49 minutes ago



Prominent Atlanta attorney Ed Buckley, whose advocacy for discriminated-against Georgia employees led to landmark civil rights protections nationwide, has died after a battle with cancer.

Buckley, 68, died Wednesday, his [law firm](#) announced Friday, adding that funeral arrangements at Holy Trinity Parish in Decatur will be announced soon.

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Born and raised in Atlanta, Buckley and his team took a Clayton County worker's case to the U.S. Supreme Court and won, in a [2020 ruling that barred workplace discrimination against gay and transgender employees](#).



Credit: arvin.temkar@ajc.com

Ed Buckley (from left), Gerald Bostock and Thomas Mew announce the settlement of Bostock's employment discrimination case against Clayton County on Friday, Nov. 4, 2022, in Atlanta. (Arvin Temkar/AJC)

“Buckley’s four-decade career leaves an indelible impact on employment law and constitutional protections in the United States,” his law firm, Buckley Bala Wilson Mew, wrote in a news release. “Buckley, a relentless advocate for the underdog, spent his career fighting on the front lines for those facing discrimination, harassment and retaliation, ensuring justice for his clients.”

In recent years, Buckley’s clients included a [Lawrenceville female police captain](#) whose allegations of sexual harassment led to two command staff officers being pushed out of the department. He also represented a [paraprofessional whose race discrimination lawsuit](#) sent Buford’s school system into turmoil and prompted the departure of its superintendent.

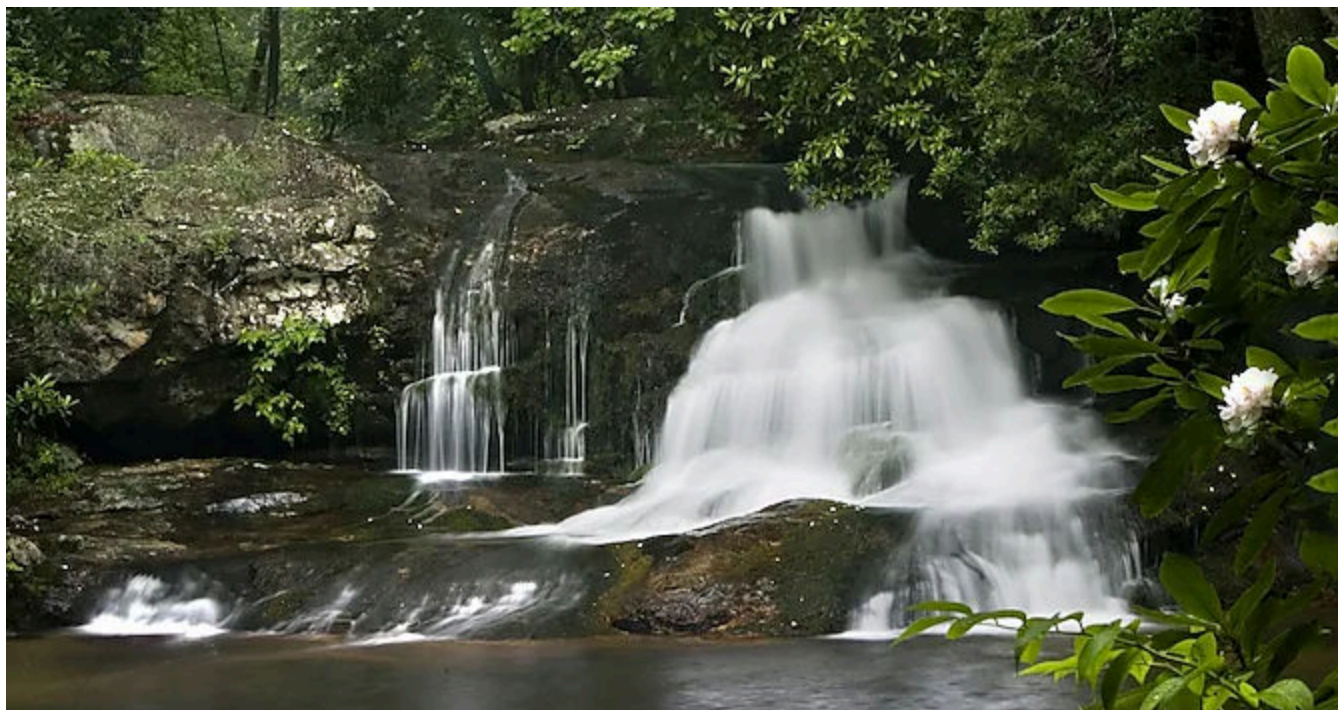
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Buckley took on an employment disability case accusing the Augusta Judicial Circuit Office of the Public Defender of demoting, disciplining and firing an administrative assistant who missed work due to her breast cancer. In March 2024, the Georgia Court of Appeals [overruled more than two decades of its own precedent](#) in deciding that case.



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In 2019, Buckley represented a [former participant in Augusta University's neurosurgery residency program](#), who claimed she was singled out to take multiple, random drug tests and eventually forced from the program because she is a woman.

That same year, the Cobb County School District settled a [lawsuit brought by another of Buckley's clients, an assistant principal](#) who said she was transferred to a different school after parents protested her introduction of yoga-based techniques to students.

Buckley was a tireless champion of civil rights, his colleagues said. He founded a [nonprofit dedicated to providing clean water to the people of Haiti](#), and he housed a Syrian refugee family for two years while helping them get settled in Atlanta.

“He was generous, and that spirit just emanated,” said Michael Kramer, an attorney in Buckley’s firm since 2010. “What made Ed a special lawyer was that he genuinely loved

people. He loved getting to know them, and he loved hearing their stories about their lives. He was just impossible not to like.”



Civil rights attorney Ed Buckley built more than 330 artesian wells and water reservoirs, providing water for nearly 350,000 people in Haiti, since he founded the nonprofit Water Life Hope in 2005. He is pictured here with some of the region’s children at one of the newest wells. (Courtesy)

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Shortly before his death, Buckley shared aspects of his life with his longtime executive legal assistant, Fatisha Martinez. She said he spoke about learning the importance of valuing and protecting human and civil rights from his parents, who hosted members of the Civil Rights Movement in their home. Buckley's father, [Ferdinand Buckley](#), was an accomplished lawyer and human rights advocate.

"You go to bat for someone and do everything you can to help them whether you're a lawyer helping a client, a mother going to bat for her child or a child on a schoolyard standing up to a bully for another kid," Buckley told Martinez.

Thomas Mew, a partner in Buckley's firm who helped lead [the landmark Clayton County case](#), said he was with Buckley last week when a small group gathered to celebrate Buckley receiving a lifetime achievement award from the Georgia chapter of the National Employment Lawyers Association.

"One of the last things that I heard Ed say as we were leaving was that the fight goes on," Mew said. "And I think that's very consistent with who Ed was. He was absolutely a fighter and a champion for justice."

Mew said Buckley was modest, but understood the importance of his work. He said Buckley was a pioneer for plaintiff lawyers who made a tremendous impact.

"He was one of the first people to apply and use the federal antidiscrimination laws to vindicate people's rights in the workplace," Mew said. "And he is responsible for a great deal of innovative case law in this area. He advanced a number of theories that are still in use today."

Outside work, Buckley wrote and published the novel ["All the Way Home"](#) and the children's book ["Pope Hope."](#)

Kramer said Buckley loved music and literature, and had considered before law school moving to New York to pursue acting and playwriting. Buckley graduated from the College of Charleston in South Carolina and Emory University School of Law in Atlanta.

Dozens of lawyers have been mentored by Buckley, including Anita Bala, who joined his firm around 2018 and is now a partner. She said that as a boss, Buckley practiced what he

preached and made employees feel valued. She said he also demonstrated great respect toward clients and opposing attorneys.

“He saw the talent in people and he nurtured that,” Bala said. “He led by example. He was also really funny. He injected humor into so many stressful situations.”

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Buckley’s talents as a storyteller and a listener made him an excellent trial lawyer, Kramer and Bala said. They said he captivated juries and was respected by judges. Bala said Buckley wasn’t afraid of a fight and inspired other lawyers to take on challenging cases.

“He took on cases that a lot of people might shy away from,” she said. “He wasn’t afraid to pick up an unlikely case and make a great case out of it.”

In Buckley’s honor, his firm’s name will remain unchanged.

## About the Author

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### Rosie Manins

Journalist Rosie Manins is a legal affairs reporter for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

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