

**T**HE great majority of women in the 1950s never imagined they could run for political office; Bess never imagined she could not. The story of her dynamic civic activism and impressive rise in elective office represents many personal successes as well as professional firsts for women. Her 1954 election as Judge of the Prince George's County Orphans' Court earned her the distinction of being the first woman in the county to serve in a judicial capacity—at just twenty-six years old! She subsequently was appointed chief judge, a position she held until 1962. In 1970, she was appointed Master for Juvenile Cases, the first woman in Maryland to hold this position. From 1978 to 1990, she served as a district court judge for Prince George's County.

Bess grew up during the Depression and was raised by her older sister after their mother died. She was the first person in her family to attend college, graduating from George Washington University in 1949. She married Bud Lavine and moved to Prince George's County in 1950.

Bess became one of her community's most energetic activists. With Bud's support and involvement, she helped organize the Riggs Manor Citizens Association. She also helped organize the League of Women Voters in her community and served as president. She organized political clubs in the Riggs and Chillum areas to send a clearer message about what the citizens expected from their elected representatives. Her political activism turned into political office, and in 1954 she made a successful election bid for Judge of the Prince George's County Orphans' Court.

While raising two daughters, managing countless local campaigns and discharging her court duties, Bess attended night school at the University of Baltimore School of Law and graduated in the top of her class in 1959. She was admitted to practice before the Maryland Court of Appeals the same year.

Her civic activism did not wane during her demanding career. As chair of the Prince George's Committee for Fair Representation in 1961, she was instrumental in a successful lawsuit which gave the state's growing metropolitan areas—like Prince George's County—a greater say in the Maryland General Assembly. A strong advocate for women and children, Bess chaired the county's Task Force on Domestic Violence. She testified before the Maryland General Assembly in support of legislation—later enacted—providing greater protection in spousal abuse cases. She demonstrated her concern for the welfare of foster children by creating a child placement review process. She also was involved in the establishment of the Byram Home, the county's first facility for emotionally disturbed adolescents. Bess also has been a role model for other women seeking careers in law, including her daughter, Sherrie Krauser. When Sherrie was appointed to the Prince George's County District Court in 1990, the two women became the first mother and daughter in the United States to serve on the same court.

The numerous awards Bess received over the years clearly illustrate the impact her professional accomplishments and community activism have had on the county. She was recognized as Outstanding Woman of the Year by the Women's Democratic Club of Prince George's County and received a similar award from the county chapter of B'nai B'rith. In 1988, she received an award from the Women's Alliance of Maryland for "significant assistance to women in crisis and transition." That same year, she was inducted into the Prince George's County Women's Hall of Fame. In 1989, she was presented with the Rita Davidson Award by the Women's Bar Association of Maryland for outstanding achievement for women in law. ♣

**BESS B. LAVINE**  
*Judge and Civic Activist, 1928-*

