


Former Illinois state Sen. Arthur Berman dies at 85

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Ray Long

Retired state Sen. Arthur L. Berman fought for schools in Chicago and throughout Illinois for more than three decades in Springfield, including as Senate Education Committee chairman.

The former North Side Democratic lawmaker died of natural causes June 6 at his Chicago residence, according to his family. He was 85.

On Monday, Senate President Don Harmon hailed Berman for bettering the lives of schoolchildren.

“Over the course of his public service, Art Berman was a leading voice for education funding reform in Illinois, always fighting for more resources for students and protecting access to vital services,” said Harmon, D-Oak Park. “He was also a genuinely delightful person.”

Berman served in the Illinois General Assembly from 1969 until stepping down in 2000. He moved from the House to the Senate in 1977, taking on the complex issues of school finance and reform as well as pushing successfully to include the Holocaust in school curricula about World War II.

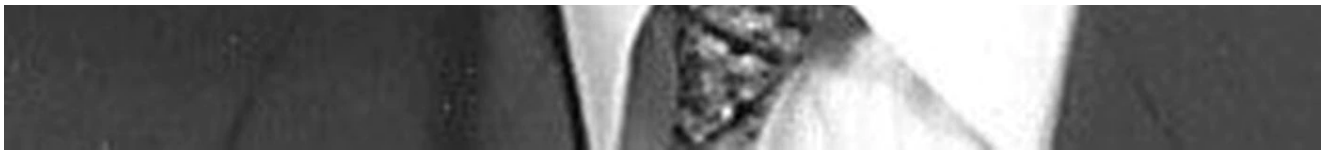
“My dad never backed away from a cause he believed was worthy and one that could educate others,” said his daughter, Marcy Padorr of Highland Park. “He was known as ‘the education senator’ for the state bills he passed to improve schooling for all Illinois children.”

Chicago Teachers Union President Jesse Sharkey remembered Berman as a “crucial advocate for public schools” whose advocacy laid the groundwork for a more equitable school funding reform in 2017.

Former Democratic Sen. Jeff Schoenberg of Evanston said Berman “was always synonymous with impassioned leadership for public education as well as a fierce defender of civil liberties and the Jewish communities’ interest. ... While he had a deft touch politically because he was a product of the Chicago Democratic machine, he was a tremendous champion for more independent policy interests.”

Born May 4, 1935, in Chicago, Berman lived his life in the Rogers Park and Edgewater neighborhoods. He graduated from Senn High School, the University of Illinois and Northwestern University School of Law. He served on the boards of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, the Anti-Defamation League, the Decalogue Society of Lawyers and the Emanuel Congregation.





Sen. Arthur Berman in 1997. (Handout)

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“He was very proud of his city,” said his son, Adam Berman of Highland Park. “He was very proud of his community. He valued being a public official, and never took it for granted.”

He recalled that as a child, he would accompany his father as he passed out campaign matchbooks while politicking at an "L" stop. Art Berman vowed to run every race as if it were a “toss-up” even when he was expected to win, his son said.

Along with his two children, Berman is survived by his wife, Barbara, and five grandchildren.

Graveside service and shiva will be private, according to the Goldman Funeral Group. Contributions may be made to the Jewish United Fund or A Silver Lining Foundation.