

Charles Hynes, Longtime Brooklyn District Attorney, Dies at 83

Prosecutor for 24 years was hailed for drug program, criticized for wrongful convictions



Brooklyn District Attorney Charles Hynes in October 2013, a month before he lost his re-election bid. PHOTO: KEVIN HAGEN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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By

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Former Brooklyn District Attorney Charles Hynes, the borough's longtime top prosecutor who changed how the office treated some drug users and people accused of domestic violence, has died at the age of 83.

Mr. Hynes, known as Joe, died Tuesday night at a hospice in Deerfield Beach, Fla., said Mr. Hynes's son, Sean Hynes. Mr. Hynes had a stroke in 2016 and had struggled with health problems over the last six months, Sean Hynes added.

A longtime Democrat, Mr. Hynes served as the borough's top prosecutor beginning in 1990. In 2013, he lost the Democratic primary to challenger Kenneth Thompson, then [lost again](#) after running in the general election on the Republican and Conservative ballot lines.

Mr. Hynes was born and raised in the Flatbush neighborhood of Brooklyn. In 1963, he joined the public-defender organization the Legal Aid Society. He joined the Brooklyn district attorney's office in 1969, as an assistant district attorney, and was named chief of the rackets bureau two years later.

He had also served as New York City's fire commissioner.

In 1987, Gov. Mario Cuomo appointed Mr. Hynes as special prosecutor in the case of young white men who attacked three black men in the Howard Beach neighborhood of Queens. One of the victims, Michael Griffith, was fatally hit by a car while attempting to escape his attackers. Mr. Hynes' prosecution resulted in three manslaughter convictions.

"A young black man during the holy season of 1986, five days before Christmas, had his life snuffed out solely because of the color of his skin," Mr. Hynes wrote in a book he co-wrote about the events, which inflamed racial tensions in the city at the time.

As district attorney, Mr. Hynes started programs that at the time were viewed as groundbreaking, such as a court that helped drug users get treatment and a program to monitor domestic-violence offenders.

He also fought allegations of misconduct for years.

Last year, the city's Conflicts of Interest Board [fined Mr. Hynes \\$40,000](#) for using city resources for his failed 2013 re-election bid. In a statement at the time, Mr. Hynes said he had made the mistake of using his city email for campaign-related matters.

He was criticized for what the district attorney's office later said were [wrongful convictions](#). Mr. Hynes noted that his office paved the way for reviewing old convictions.

Friends and associates described Mr. Hynes as loyal, open and a devout Catholic.

“He always remembered little things about people that made you feel special,” said Frank Carone, law chair to the Brooklyn Democratic Party. Mr. Carone said Mr. Hynes knew that he had been in the U.S. Marines. “Every time he saw me, he would say Semper Fi or something patriotic reflecting the Marine Corps.”

“We lost our hero last night,” said Sean Hynes, his son. “He was a caring, loving, amazing man.”