

California State Senate

SENATOR
HOLLY J. MITCHELL
THIRTIETH SENATORIAL DISTRICT



SYLVIA JEWELL JOHNSON

Born September 25, 1936 in South Los Angeles to Jewell Franklin and Virgil Benson, Sylvia came into the world trailblazing.

Through the early support and tutelage of her grandmothers, Pauline Bruce and Helen Franklin, her lifelong professional mentor and friend Ruth Rushen, and a career-long caseload of women and children in need, she grew to become the wise, compassionate, driven, direct leader her friends and colleagues adored and her foes feared.



In short, she was something else.

She graduated from Hooper Avenue Elementary, Carver Junior High and Jefferson High schools in the winter of 1953. While having received a scholarship to attend UCLA, "Momma" (Grandmother Franklin) had different plans...so to USC she went and graduated in 1958, a Trojan for life.

With her Sociology degree in hand, she began a 45-year professional journey of public service to the people of the State of California.

From Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services (where she met, shared office space with and ultimately married Edward Mitchell in 1961), to the Probation Department, to her 1980 appointment by Governor Jerry Brown as Superintendent of the California Institution for Women, to a return to Probation in San Bernardino County and finally as Chief Probation Officer (serving as the first African American and first woman) of Alameda County, she touched the lives of countless men, women and children across the state.

She was an innovator; receiving grants and developing national models for substance abuse treatment, non-traditional training for incarcerated women and girls and gender-specific programming and prevention services for juvenile offenders.

She was a visionary; she led and mentored hundreds of employees and skillfully managed major institutions, budgets and politics.

She was a sister-friend, mentor, motivator, and confidant who had style and panache...and loved fine clothes and casinos.

She loved and was loved by "Big Ed" for over 30 years.

And last but not least, she was Holly's "Mommy" and Ryan's "G-Ma" and she loved, guided, spoiled and supported them unconditionally their entire lives.

She is survived by daughter Holly J. Mitchell, #1 Grandson Ryan J. Mitchell, cousins Danny Jones and Clarence Banks and a host of life-long friends.