Ontario Chief Justice William Carrington Howland  
(March 17, 1915 – May 13, 1994)

A true advocate for transparency in the courts and for the protection of the rights of the people of Ontario

William Goldwin Carrington Howland (March 17, 1915 – May 13, 1994) was a respected lawyer, judge and the former Chief Justice of Ontario, Canada. Justice Howland was born in Toronto and educated at Upper Canada College. He graduated from the University of Toronto in 1936, and afterwards enrolled at Osgoode Hall and called to the Bar of Ontario in 1939. In 1975, Howland was appointed a Judge to the Court of Appeal, Supreme Court of Ontario. Two years later, he was appointed Chief Justice of Ontario, and remained in this position until his retirement in 1992.

Chief Justice Howland strongly believed in transparency in the administration of Justice and protecting the rights of the people of Ontario

In a bold decision intended to bolster the public’s respect for the administration of Justice by promoting transparency in the courts of Ontario, on April 10, 1989, Chief Justice Howland issued a historic Practice Directive to all Ontario Courts which reaffirmed the right of the citizens of Ontario to audio record their own court hearing under Section 136(2)(b) of Ontario's Courts of Justice Act. In his Directive to all courts in Ontario, Chief Justice Howland ordered that the right of the citizens granted under section 136(2)(b) of Ontario’s Courts of Justice Act to audio record their own court proceedings using their own audio recording devices was to be respected by the courts without the people of Ontario having to make oral or written arguments before the presiding judge. The only discretion that judges had was with the manner in which people could record. The “manner” referred to where people could physically locate their own recording devices so as to not obstruct the proceedings.

In light of the wide-spread practice of official court transcripts being altered after hearings by judges in the lower courts, many consider Justice Howland's directive to the courts as one of his most notable contributions to promoting transparency in the courts and protecting the rights of self represented individuals before the courts. While many judges show their disrespect to Justice Howland by ignoring his wise and judicious decision, Justice Howland's practice directive continues to be used as a reference when audio recording equipment is used by self represented persons in their court hearings.


"Subject to any order made by the presiding judge as to non-publication of court proceedings, and to the right of the presiding judge to give such directions from time to time as he or she may see fit as to the manner in which an audio recording may be made at a court hearing pursuant to s. 146 [now s. 136] of the Courts of Justice Act, the unobtrusive use of a recording device from the body of the courtroom by a solicitor, a party acting in person, or a journalist for the sole purpose of supplementing or replacing handwritten notes may be considered as being approved without an oral or written application to the presiding judge.” Chief Justice of Ontario W.G.C. Howland