Good evening, everyone. And welcome to Suffolk University's Celebration of Black Excellence.

Please welcome the co-chair of the Suffolk University Black Alumni Network and member of the Suffolk University Law School Alumni Board, Tamela Bailey.

Thank you. Thank you. Oh, here he is, the man of the hour. I was about to stall. Look at this. The party doesn't start until Ernst, until Ernst gets here. Thank you for coming. (audience laughs)

We weren't gonna start without you. I, no, I'm serious. I told Caitlin we can't start without you. All right. All right, all right. So, good evening, everyone. I'm gonna say that again. Good evening, everyone.

So, my is Tamela Bailey, as was just announced, I am so excited to be here with everyone. I'm looking in the audience. Like, who did I invite? (audience laughs) They better be here, or they should be watching. So, I am a 2004 graduate of the law school, a member of the alumni board of directors, co-chair with Hind, of Suffolk University Black Alumni Network. I'm co-chair and so is Hind. Chair of the all rise committee, I'm a former president of the Black Law Students Association at Suffolk University.

I am a Ram mentor, a mentor to several law students, and I participate on a few other committees. Suffolk is keeping me busy. So, with us tonight are many members of the Suffolk community, including President Marisa Kelly, and president, the presidential spouse, Margie Arnold, chairman of the board to trustees, Bob Lamb,
as well as several other trustees,
including one of tonight's honorees,
my brother from another mother,
(audience laughs)
Ernst Guerrier,
the Dean of the Sawyer Business School, Amy Zeng,
and many others, including Suffolk administrators,
faculty, and alumni, and students.
In addition,
we have several past Black Excellence Award recipients
in the audience tonight that I want to recognize.
You can stand or not.
Is Roxann Cooke here?
(audience member cheers) Roxann!
(audience claps)
Thank you for coming out.
Is Sharice Perry in the room?
Not yet?
And Cherina, is Cherina here with us tonight yet?
Well, Cherina is always here in spirit
because she supports us so much.
So, it is your attendance and participation
that makes this event very special.
And I will add that I'm so happy we are here in person,
considering what happened in February,
and this evening would not be possible
without the great work
of the Black Excellence Planning Committee,
made up of alumni, students, faculty and staff
from all three Suffolk schools.
We have met the past several months,
actually more than the past several months,
since this was supposed to happen in February,
and we had to start over, kind of,
working closely with Caitlin and her team.
Anna Maria, I wanna mention her.
Will the members of the Black Excellence Committee,
as well as Caitlin and her team,
please stand so we can give you a round of applause?
(audience claps)
Thank you.
So, many of you may know
that the Black Excellence Celebration is actually one
of SUBAN's largest events.
As co-chair, I'd like
to provide you a quick background about SUBAN.
It started in 2018 by our pioneer, Ernst Guerrier,
trustee, Ernst Guerrier,
Jenny Joseph-Hayle, Joyce Miller and several others
who I won't list all the names, but those are a few.
SUBAN's mission is to celebrate and serve current
and future Black alumni through mentoring,
philanthropy, volunteerism, and events.
SUBAN supports the recruitment, retention,
academic achievement, and successful graduation of Black students. SUBAN also supports the career development and professional opportunities of Black students and alumni. All Suffolk graduates are invited to join SUBAN. If you have any interest in getting involved in SUBAN, please make sure you sign our sign-in sheet, which is at the front desk. We are always looking for dedicated alumni with passion to help us achieve SUBAN's mission. Please join us and become a member on LinkedIn. We also are currently looking for Black alumni to be mentors of SUBAN's mentoring program, which is in the works. I want to recognize as well the SUBAN leadership committee, who serves as ambassadors of the university, working closely with Caitlin in the office of advancement to promote alumni engagement and giving, particularly for the SUBAN scholarship. Will the SUBAN leadership committee members all please stand? And we will give them a round of applause (audience claps) Thank you. And speaking of the SUBAN scholarship, I want to give a big thank you to all of you who contributed to the SUBAN Scholarship Fund. And I would be remiss if I didn't mention, we hope that other folks are in a giving spirit. If you're feeling like donating this evening, you can definitely do so. We also have a fundraiser happening this evening, where you can buy a SUBAN t-shirt. We have long and short sleeve t-shirts. Some of the proceeds will go to the SUBAN scholarship. That is another way that you can donate. And they're really nice t-shirts actually. So, without further ado, it is now my pleasure to introduce Suffolk's 11th President, to you, Dr. Marisa Kelly. (audience claps) Wait a minute. I didn't give her accolades yet. You can't clap. (audience laughs) President Kelly is deeply committed to Suffolk and she brings to the presidency strong leadership and a clear vision for the university's future. Thanks to President Kelly's leadership, the university is breaking fundraising records, building its national and international reputation, engaging more alumni, recruiting more students from diverse backgrounds and developing innovative educational programs. We are so fortunate to have her as our president.
07:43 Please join me now in welcoming
07:45 to the podium President Dr. Marisa Kelly.
07:49 (audience claps)
07:57 <v ->Thank you, Tamela, and good evening, everybody.</v
08:00 It is such a pleasure to be here with you tonight,
08:03 whether in person
08:04 or for those of us who are joining on Zoom.
08:07 From wherever you may be, welcome.
08:09 And thank you so much for being here.
08:11 And I want to give my special welcome,
08:14 or rather special appreciation to the planning committee
08:17 and the entire alumni relations team
08:20 that is responsible for planning this event.
08:25 It's always a fabulous, fabulous gathering.
08:28 And I know it takes a lot of work to make this happen.
08:31 This is an exciting night.
08:34 It is absolutely an exciting night
08:36 and it's in part because it's wonderful
08:39 to be back together again,
08:41 but it's especially an exciting night
08:43 because we are here for this particular event,
08:45 which has really become one
08:48 of my favorite new Suffolk traditions.
08:54 Why?
08:54 Because tonight, and on every occasion
08:57 when we gather in the Celebration of Black Excellence,
09:00 we are celebrating inclusion and achievement.
09:05 And those two things are both essential
09:09 to who we are as an institution.
09:12 Now, you may have heard me say this before,
09:14 but it's important and worth repeating.
09:17 Suffolk was founded on the ideas of equality
09:21 of opportunity and democracy in education.
09:25 The conviction that every person should have access
09:29 to an empowering education,
09:31 irrespective of an individual's race,
09:34 gender, ethnicity, orientation, or income level.
09:37 That fundamental principle still sits at our core.
09:44 We are an inclusive community made up of many races
09:48 and people of many backgrounds.
09:50 We stand for the highest principles of diversity,
09:55 human dignity and respect.
09:59 And while we do not always succeed
10:02 in living up to our ideals, we always strive to do so.
10:10 Tonight, we celebrate alumni, faculty and staff
10:15 who are working in various ways
10:16 to advance important JEDI goals here in our community
10:21 and outside of it,
10:22 individuals who are helping us get closer in word and deed
10:28 to our ideals.
10:30 I'm excited to hear from our distinguished keynote speaker.
10:33 And thank you so much, Linda, for being with us tonight,
10:37 I'm excited to year from all of our speakers and honorees
10:41 and my congratulations to all of our honorees in advance.
At an institutional level, our commitment to action continues. We know that we have more work to do. We are examining our JEDI initiatives. We are building on those that have been successful, such as our Ambassadors for Inclusion Program, which now includes a second level program for graduates of the first. Under the leadership of Dr. Joyya Smith, our Vice President for Diversity, Access and Inclusion, we are the lead institution working with AICUM, that's the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Massachusetts, under her leadership, we are working with AICUM in the launch of an inclusive leadership program for higher educational professionals from colleges and universities all across the state. We are recommitting ourselves to partnerships that support our mission, such as our dual enrollment program in partnership with Boston Public Schools. We have expanded our JEDI work to include a new procurement initiative, so that we can use Suffolk's purchasing power to help close the wealth gap, a problem that has been ignored for far too long.

And we are focused on creating more opportunities to hear from our students of color, so that we can better support them in the ways they tell us they need. There is much work to be done and we will continue to do it. And I know we have your support in that endeavor, and we will continue to celebrate and honor those who are so essential to this work. Again, my congratulations to all of tonight's honorees and my thanks to all of you for joining us here tonight or over Zoom. Have a great evening.

And now, please welcome to the podium the co-chair of the Suffolk University Black Alumni Network, Hind Habbach. Thank you, President Kelly. Hello, and happy Friday, everyone. Well, I'm glad mother nature worked out in my favor because I couldn't make the February event. Thanks, Boston.

It's wonderful to be here in person. Thanks to everyone attending virtually. My name is Hind Habbach. I'm a college of arts and sciences class of '09 graduate.
Over the last year, it's been my honor and privilege to serve as co-chair alongside Tamela as Suffolk University's Black Alumni Network co-chair. I serve on both the Black Excellence Planning Committee and the Scholarship Committee as well. We're joined here today by a few scholarship recipients, both in person and remotely. And I cannot stress enough how important your support means to both current and future scholarship recipients. Tamela briefly touched upon the SUBAN Scholarship Fund, which is the first of its kind. It was set up, of course, to establish and support students with financial need who are minoring in Black studies, who are involved in the Black Student Union, the Black Student Association, or who have demonstrated knowledge and/or academic interest in underrepresented minority populations. Last year, we awarded three scholarships about, of about $5,000, totaling, 15,000 across the three schools, the College of Arts and Sciences, the Law School and the Sawyer Business School. I urge all of you today who haven't already made a donation or are thinking about making a donation to take a moment to learn more about the SUBAN Scholarship and help deserving students in need in the spirit of Suffolk University and paying it forward. And now, speaking of paying it forward, I now will like to introduce someone who does pay it forward and have the privilege of introducing our keynote speaker, Linda Dorcena Forry. Linda is a former Massachusetts State Senator and state representative. For over two decades, Linda dedicated her professional career in public service, working in various capacities in both state and local government. As a first generation American of Haitian descent, she gained from her parents a strong work ethic and understanding of transformational power of education and recognized the value of civic engagement from a very early age. A native Bostonian, Linda was the first woman and person of color to represent the Commonwealth's first Suffolk district, a diverse and thriving cross section of the, of Boston, that includes Dorchester, Mattapan, South Boston and Hyde Park. And I wonder if my Boston accent did come out there. (audience laughs) In 2008, in 2018, Linda transitioned to the private sector.
and became the Vice President of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Relations at Suffolk Construction.

Linda led the design and implementation of Suffolk Construction's national strategy to strengthen their diversity and inclusion platform, which is beyond words for me.

That's amazing.

Linda is now the Vice President of External Relations at Suffolk Construction, developing long-term strategies and tactics that support Suffolk Construction's vision.

Linda is also a co-founder of the new Commonwealth Racial Equity and Social Justice Fund, along with several Black and brown corporate executives from leading companies.

This fund provides essential support, resources, and thought leadership to make progressive societal changes by addressing systemic racism and racial inequity in all of Massachusetts.

So, please join me in giving Linda Dorcena Forry a warm welcome.

Okay, guys. Come on, sit down.

Stop the nonsense.

Okay. It is, first of all, good evening, everyone.

Good evening, everyone.

It is wonderful to be here.

I am thrilled to be with all of you here this evening.

Thank you, Hind Habbach, for that wonderful introduction.

What an honor, to join SUBAN, the Black Student Union, and the Black Law Students Association for the fourth year of Celebrating Black Excellence.

And to be here as you present awards out to seven outstanding members of the alumni, faculty and staff community of Suffolk University, among the recipients are two of my childhood close friends who we've known,

we've known each other for a long, long time,

but Caitlin, let me give it up to Caitlin and her team,

who's, who was on the email (audience claps)

and Zoom with Tamela, I mean, all day long, you know,

to President Kelly, Dr. Marisa Kelly,

you are doing a fantastic job here at Suffolk,

and we're so happy (audience claps)

that you're with us this evening.

And a special thanks to Tamela Bailey, and no, but it's true.

(audience claps) We're on the phone, y'all.
And to Hind, right?
For your work and your leadership in leading SUBAN, very, very important.
And to the honorees tonight, my friends, my colleagues, in some cases, my neighbors and pretty much family, right?
Rachel, Tony, Sonia, Jennifer, Loletta, and as I mentioned, the two people that I've known for a long, long time.
I want to recognize, because it's amazing, right?
I'm gonna pull it together (laughs).
First, I'm gonna start with someone whose family and my family grew up together in Haiti. You see I'm first generation American.
My parents came to this great country in search of opportunity.
And when they came here, they taught us the importance of reaching back and giving back to those that come next.
And so this incredible person that I've known, my goodness, I'm gonna say, St. Kevin's School, and it's incredible that, you know, he's part of this Suffolk community, but what an amazing accomplishment, the Associate Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, the Honorable Serge Georges, give it up. (audience claps)
Come on!
And to someone who was mentioned earlier by Tamela, the icon, the trailblazer.
It's true, right?
I mean, Marie (laughs), the one and only, now I remember Ernst back in the day. I was like 12. Okay?
I think I'm still kind of millennium. I'm not a millennial. I'm not. I'm no longer. (audience laughs) That ship has sailed.
But really, wanna give it up, you know, for your vision in pulling together this community of alumni and saying, it's important that we come together and support Black Alumni Network and people of the diaspora. So, they know that this is their place and their home. Give it up, y'all, for Ernst Guerrier.
There's so much greatness and so much more excellent that lies ahead of us. And I'm so happy to celebrate it with all of you tonight. And all of us in this room are blessed that we can be here this evening. Aren't we? With everything that has happened.
Hello, Tony.
And you know, I've not spoken to a room like this.
21:29 in a long, long time.
21:31 So, who's keeping time?
21:32 I just wanna make sure.
21:36 I'm gonna be good. I'm gonna be good.
21:37 I got this.
21:38 So I've been thinking a bit, a lot about this event,
21:40 a Celebration of Black Excellence.
21:43 Black excellence.
21:45 Join me. Black excellence.
21:48 One more time.
21:49 <v Group>Black excellence.</v
21:52 <v ->And let's think about that for a moment.</v
21:54 Isn't that turn of phrase a curious one?
21:57 I mean, in some ways it's sort of redundant,
22:01 like saying wet water
22:05 or hot sun, or ice cold,
22:12 Black and excellence.
22:15 It should be considered synonymous. Right?
22:19 And look at this room, look around you.
22:22 Turn to your left, turn to your right,
22:26 excellence, excellence, excellence.
22:28 That's what tonight is about.
22:30 (audience claps)
22:38 So, you know we are fortunate to live in a time
22:40 in which increasingly those two words mean the same thing.
22:47 As a mom of four, my husband,
22:50 Bill Forry and I are raising our kids like many of you here
22:56 to be proud of their roots, the richness of their ancestry,
23:01 all the gifts endowed on them by the blend of cultures
23:05 and bloodlines and struggles and triumphs.
23:09 Their Blackness is a birthright that doesn't just speak
23:12 to their inner beauty or their outer beauty.
23:16 It speaks to the decades and centuries of perseverance
23:20 and sacrifice and overcoming the most persistent
23:24 and pervasive of obstacles, the hardness of the human heart.
23:31 So, thanks to many of you
23:33 and your parents and their parents,
23:36 we're in a place today
23:38 where to be Black and excellent isn't an aberration.
23:43 It's an expectation.
23:46 (audience claps)
23:51 But that doesn't mean we shouldn't celebrate it too,
23:55 because Lord knows, for long enough,
23:57 these sort of evenings were denied
24:00 to too many deserving people.
24:03 And we all need to,
24:05 the reminder from time to time of the truth I just laid out.
24:09 It's our job to make sure we pass
24:12 that message along to the next generation,
24:15 the young men and women educated here at Suffolk,
24:18 which is what you're doing, with a particular focus of those
24:22 of us from the African and Caribbean diaspora,
24:25 because that truth, the reality of Black excellence,
it's our truth.
But we all know it's not everyone's truth.
And that's why we're here tonight.
We don't have the luxury to lay back.
We know the forces that are out and about afoot in this country that don't believe in Black excellence.
They haven't gone away and they have no plans to change course.
And by the way, when we uplift Black excellence, it's important to remind ourselves that, in doing so, we don't seek to diminish any other culture or other people.

Black excellence lifts everyone.
You hear me?
Black excellence lifts everyone.
And it's always been so.
Our greatness enhanced the fabric of America, making it stronger and nimble and resilient, strong enough to withstand the assault of hatred, bigotry, transphobia, intolerance, and yes, even insurrection.

So, this work requires all of us, 'cause like I said, Black excellence lifts everyone.
It requires all of us to do it together.
In our jobs, in our communities, in our schools, we have to hold each other accountable, not just our words, but the actions, and Dr. Kelly, President Dr. Kelly said it today, right?

It's about action.
And the procurement in looking at, creating, closing the wealth gap, making sure that there are opportunities is critical.
How are we being purposeful and intentional in truly created an inclusive culture?
Are we embedding changes in our policies and procedures that have held so many people back?
And I want you to think of the work, wherever you work, right?
In your communities,
what are some things we can do differently?
Are we fostering a culture of empathy and understanding?
Very important, right?
We want people to be able to place themselves in someone else's shoes,
to just get a sense of what people are going through.
And this is not a race thing, right?
It's not.
It's about us taking that moment and being human and recognizing, as I lift up the immigrant issue, we're all immigrants in this country, generations of immigrants, from the Irish and the Italian.
So, many people that came and that struggled. How do we help and support and uplift this incredible place we call America, that is made up of so many people and so many languages? In working together, bringing our thoughts together at the table to tackle these difficult issues before us. So, tonight isn't a rest on your laurels kind of night folks, right? It's not. This is definitely a past, present and future sort of night, because we're not done making a difference. You all are not done making a difference. You're not done being leaders. You're not finished with the journey that led you here tonight. Not by a long shot, right? And neither am I. Neither are any of you in this room because you are in these places where you have an opportunity to create change, when it comes and when you see it. So, being in government for 22 years and being elected for 13 years and looking at legislation and policy, you know, I'm proud of some of the work that I was able to do with my colleagues and with governors, both Baker and Patrick. But when I think of that, I think of access and opportunity. When I represented the first Suffolk district, the first time there was someone from Dorchester, the first time there was a woman, first time there was a person of color that sat in the Senate seat of South Boston, they called it, right? (audience claps) But as I represented that amazing district, right? Incredible district. And it comes full circle because I'm a kid who grew up in Dorchester in Uphams corner, right? And I remember when my dad drove through South Boston, I wasn't in the car, but two of my kids were, two of my siblings were, and a rock came through his window. And here it is, his daughter elected this incredible district, only here in our great America can this happen. Right? But it's true. (audience claps) But I bring up the Senate because I say, you are in spaces where you're able to open the door, right? And we've talked about this, Tamela, right? How do you open doors for others?
And as a Senator, there was an opportunity. When we think about development and when we think about access and opportunity, and for me, it was looking at legislation. Tony may remember this. I look at Chrystal too. Okay. I'm calling out names now. These are government folks. But you know, in terms of the expansion of the convention center and the billion dollar, you know, convention center, within that language that we were able to craft talked about equity by people of color, in big developments in our city. And that was realized, it's now called the Massport Model. Right? It was realized with the Omni Hotel. But that's where it is. Wherever you are, don't have to be elected, the space that you're working in, that you're living in, how do we stand up and be there for others? How do we create opportunity? You know, for other people, is really, really important. So we belong, I'll say this, 'cause this was one of the pieces we had talked about too, in terms of all of us, we belong in spaces. But in particular, I wanna talk to the students, right? And stuff, who are, a lot of times in our city, in our state, I'll say this, right? In other places, you will go around the country where you will be the only one, right? You will be the one, you will be the two or you will be the three people of color, Black, Latinx, Asian, Native American, two or more cultures that are in a room. And it can be annoying. No doubt about it, right? When you see it, when you see that happening. But know, which is really important, that you belong in that room. You belong in that room because so many people came before you. You belong in that room because you have something to contribute and something to add to the conversation. So, let's hold our head up high. (audience claps) So, let's hold our head up high and walk in with all those who came before, and let's get it done, 'cause that's what it's about. Let's get it done and make a difference. And so, I'm thrilled, really excited to hear from the honorees. And I know many of you, as I said, from my time spent in elected life. And some of you, like I said, have been family, but your stories inspire us.
And that's the truth.
It inspires us. It inspires me.
And they inspire the students who you serve
and guide here at Suffolk and beyond.
And you are each deserving of these honors.
And I wanna thank you all for having me here tonight.
And to know that this work just continues.
It's another reiteration, but we can do this,
if we can put everything aside,
wherever people stand, whatever people are thinking,
we can come to the table and have real conversations.
It doesn't have to be adversarial because we have to do this
in order to save our great America.
Thank you all and God bless.

To kick off the Black Excellence Awards portion of the evening,
please welcome member of the Sawyer Business School Alumni Association
and past chair of the Suffolk University Black Alumni Network,
Jenny Joseph-Hayle.

Good evening.
It is my pleasure to begin the awards portion of the ceremony.
The Planning Committee reviewed the credentials of numerous Suffolk alumni, faculty and staff members who were nominated by the Suffolk community to receive Black Excellence Awards.
Selecting just a few to honor tonight was no easy task.
Our alumni are out in the world doing impressive work and Suffolk faculty and staff members are truly dedicated in supporting our students.
The Celebration of Black Excellence Outstanding Alumni Awards are presented to alumni who have made a significant contribution to society and/or their professions and thereby achieved a level of distinction, which has brought honor to them and to the Suffolk community.
The Celebration of Black Excellence Outstanding Faculty and Staff Awards are presented to faculty and staff members who support and empower Suffolk students and are exemplary members of the Suffolk community.
It is my honor to present the first two awards of the evening.
At this time, I ask that President Kelly join me.
This year's recipient of the Sawyer Business School Black Excellence Outstanding Alumni Award is Tony Richards. (audience cheers) (Jenny laughs) (audience claps) Tony earned his masters of public administration degree from Sawyer Business School, a proud MPA alum as well. Currently, yeah. (audience claps) MPA (cheers). (Jenny laughs) Currently, he serves as Vice President of Equitable Business Development at the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency. In his role, he works across the agency to increase the impact and reach of Mass Housing's work, particularly when it comes to closing gaps between home ownership and wealth. Tony worked previously as Deputy Chief of Staff in the Massachusetts Governor's Office and managed the Office of Access and Opportunity. During his tenure, he led the inception of the largest reform in the history of the Commonwealth, ensuring greater mandated minority participation in procurement accounting. These efforts yielded $2 billion in annual spending for small and diverse businesses and up to $3 billion for real estate development. The energy and enthusiasm Tony brings to diversity, equity, and inclusion issues, extends far beyond his office and includes his involvement with his father's No Books No Ball Youth Program, which seeks to use basketball as a means to achieve academic success for at-risk children. In recognition of many of his many outstanding accomplishment as a graduate, as a proud MPA graduate, and in anticipation of his continued success and positive impact, we are pleased to present the Sawyer Business School Black Excellence Outstanding Alumni Award to Tony Richards. (audience claps) <v ->Always takes so long</v to figure it out. (audience laughs) (audience claps) (paper crinkles) <v ->Cool.</v Let me get this together. I knew Serge was here. So I needed to, you know, make sure I got something. So, good evening. First, I want to send a special shout out to, you know, my other half who certainly deserves
to share this honor with me,
you know, especially during the pandemic,
you know, she's holding down the fort.
I'm out, you know, trying to,
you know, do a bunch of stuff.
So just a quick round of applause for my wife.

And also, I would like to congratulate tonight's honorees.
I am humbled to receive this honor amongst,
you know, such prestigious guests and, you know,
a special shout out to, you know, President Kelly.
I think, creating uncomfortable change is needed, right?
It's not always comfortable when you lean in.
So, I just want to give a special shout out.

You know, but when I was thinking about this award
and I look out into the audience today, I think of a,
you know, I feel compelled
to think of an African proverb that's,
you know, always with me.
And it says that if you want to go fast, go alone,
but if you want to go far, go together.
And I think that, you know,
pretty much sums up my experience at Suffolk.
You know, before I started the MPA program,
you know, I really didn't know what I didn't know.
And, you know, Suffolk,
you know, by extension,
you know, changed me
throughout understanding a greater sense of awareness
throughout that process.
So, I had the, you know, extraordinary opportunity of,
you know, when I was completing my MPA,
you know, I was senior staff at the governor's office.
I was, you know, the most highest ranking,
you know, Black person within the administration.
And, you know, I had the privilege and honor of,
you know, working closely with the governor every day.
And I very quickly was able to realize what I didn't know
and try to just work aggressively to, you know,
close that gap and distance.
And I just really understood a lot of those core principles
from my coursework at Suffolk.
And, you know, that was just,
you know, extraordinary at the time and,
you know, stays with me.
And now I, you know,
I have the distinct opportunity to work at Mass Housing and,
you know, for Chrystal Kornegay, who's,
you know, here today, who's just,
you know, super amazing. (audience claps)
And you know, Chrystal,
you know, has given me the,
you know, opportunity, which is enormous,
40:57 to drive real meaningful change
40:59 in Massachusetts and throughout,
41:01 as we seek to aggressively narrow racial home ownership gaps
41:05 and expand opportunities for diverse businesses
41:08 and developers as well.
41:10 And Mass Housing's work is so important, especially,
41:13 you know, at a time like today,
41:14 where affordable housing and home ownership is just really
41:18 at a forefront with closing equity divides.
41:20 So, I'm super excited about that work.
41:23 And, the last thing I'll say is,
41:26 you know, it really comes down to this.
41:28 I say this a lot when I,
41:29 anytime I speak, anytime I kinda get on a mic is, you know,
41:32 I come from a working class home, right?
41:34 You know, my dad is here with me today, a quick shout out,
41:37 a quick, quick, you know, clap up to my dad.
41:39 (audience claps)
41:40 You know, he's dressed up today,
41:45 (audience laughs)
41:46 which is cool, but, you know, throughout my,
41:49 my dad is an iron worker by trade
41:51 and he's in the, you know, labor union,
41:54 you know, so throughout my life,
41:55 you know, my dad came home with,
41:57 you know, dirty boots by the back door, right?
42:00 You know, working 12 hour shifts,
42:02 you know, the time I got to him, he was,
42:05 you know, bone tired and still had the opportunity to,
42:08 you know, better his community.
42:10 Right?
42:11 And I think the hard work and the dedication
42:13 and the importance that he set on education, you know,
42:17 just allows me the chance to, you know,
42:18 go to work every day in a fresh white shirt,
42:21 in a nice tailored blue suit,
42:24 just trying to make a change for people
42:26 throughout the Commonwealth that look like me as well.
42:29 So, and it's an extraordinary privilege, that is.
42:32 And I thank everybody here tonight for this award.
42:35 (audience claps)
42:50 <v ->Congratulations, Tony.</v
42:54 The Sawyer Business School
42:55 Black Excellence Outstanding Faculty Staff Award recipient
42:59 is Sonia Alleyne.
43:01 Sonia currently serves as an Executive in Residence
43:04 at the Institute of Public Service
43:06 and as a faculty member
43:08 of the Moakley Center for Public Management.
43:11 Her expertise,
43:13 her area of expertise is non-profit organizations.
43:16 She's also the President and CEO
43:18 of the newly created Suffolk County Community Foundation.
43:23 Sonia received her MPA.
Sonia received her MPA degree from Suffolk in 2001. She served for 14 years as the Vice President and New England Regional Manager of Community Reinvestment at Santander Bank Foundation. She returned to her Alma Mater to serve on Suffolk's faculty in 2015. Over the years, Sonia has volunteered her time and talent to a wide variety of community organizations and has been honored with numerous citations from the Massachusetts State Senate, House of Representatives and the Boston City Council. She received both the Mayor's Award for Community Service in 2008 and the Boston Woman's Fund Woman of Action Award in 2010. In recognition of her outstanding service and dedication to Suffolk University and our students, we are pleased to honor Sonia Alleyne with the SBS Black Excellence Faculty and Staff Award.

Unfortunately, her daughter Taisha will accept the award on her behalf. However, her daughter Taisha will accept the award on her behalf.

Okay. It's no secret I'm not Sonia. Unfortunately, she is not here tonight. We had a death in our family, so she is in Barbados celebrating our aunt's life. But on her behalf, I accept this prestigious award. I thank you all. I'm very proud of my mom. And I appreciate you guys honoring her tonight. Have a good night and congratulations to all the other honorees.

Taking a second to turn all the way (laughs). Alrighty, good evening, everyone. My name is Ahria Ilyas. I use she, her pronouns and I'm currently a junior here at Suffolk University. I'm an undergrad law major with a double minor in mathematics and Spanish. Thank you (laughs). Oh, thank you. Wow. (Ahria laughs) And I'm also a diversity peer educator for the Center of Student Diversity and Inclusion.

This evening, I have the honor of presenting two awards.
The first is the College of Arts and Sciences Black Excellence Outstanding Alumni Award. This year's award goes to Rachel Deleveaux. (audience claps)

Rachel is the Assistant Vice President of Organizational Culture, Inclusion, and Equity at Simmons University. She is a 2007 graduate of Suffolk University's higher education administration master's program.

And this past year, she has provided exemplary service to her Alma Mater, serving as the first Black woman President of the Suffolk University College of Arts and Sciences Alumni Association Board.

A long time champion for equity and access for marginalized communities, Rachel leads a diversity, equity and inclusion framework at Simmons that seeks to transform campus-wide systems, policies and practices.

She has also founded a mentoring program that focuses on mentoring Black students attending predominantly white schools across the country.

Rachel has dedicated her life to breaking glass ceilings and championing equity and access for marginalized communities.

She served as the region one representative for the socioeconomic and class issues in higher education knowledge community for the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, and currently serves as a member of diversity councils at both Northeastern University and North Shore Community College.

She has mentored countless students and is passionate about everything she does.

In recognition of her many outstanding accomplishments as a Suffolk University graduate and in anticipation of her continued success and positive impact, we're pleased to present the College of Arts and Sciences Black Excellence Outstanding Alumni Award to Rachel Deleveaux.

How's everyone doing?

Great.

I grew up in a Black church, y'all.

Well, first of all, thank you, Suffolk.

Thank you, SUBAN.
Thank you to my Lord and savior Jesus Christ.
Thank you to my two grandmothers, Esmeralda and Ida, for whose shoulders I'm standing on. Thank you to my dad, Donald and my mom, Susan, who are watching right now. Thank you to my favorite person in the whole wide world, my son, Asher, who is watching me right now. 
Thank you to my amazing CAS alumni board. Thank you to my friends, some of who are here today. Thank you to my family and my village. I, this is divine.
I've been in Boston. I've been back in Boston for 10 years. I'm gonna try not to cry, but I'm a Pisces, so forgive me. I've been back in Boston for 10 years.
After I graduated from Suffolk in 2007, still recovering from cancer, I left Massachusetts, you know, vowing never to come back and the world is my oyster.
So you can imagine the disappointment and the defeat I felt when I came back five years later, facing a divorce and pregnant, you know, and back in a worse place than I had left, you know, and just Section 8, food stamps, all of that, you know? And so, I grinded.
Year one, I grinded.
Year two, I grinded. Nothing.
Year three, I grinded. Nothing.
Year four, I grinded. Nothing.
Hey God, where you at?
It's me (laughs).
Year five, I grinded. Nothing.
Year six, I grinded. Nothing.
Year seven, I grinded.
Hey God, where you at?
What's going on? Nothing.
Year eight, a little bit of something.
Year nine, half of something.
And year 10, a lot of everything.
It's the impact that you make by doing what you do.
You never know what, when your time is going to come and you won't ever know if you quit.
I encourage everyone to fall into their passion because then you will stumble upon your purpose and your purpose, by the way, is not what you do. It's the impact that you make by doing what you do.
So, thank you to everyone.
Thank you to my village.
God bless and have a good evening.
Congratulations, Rachel. That was very inspiring. So, thank you.

It is now my pleasure to present the Suffolk University Black Excellence Outstanding Staff Award to Jennifer Blakely.

Yeah, yeah. Jennifer serves as the head of access services for the Mildred F Sawyer Library. She received a master's degree in education from Suffolk in 2020. Since joining the university in 2014, she has built on Suffolk's commitment to access and opportunity with a particular focus on making the campus a more welcoming and better place for students of color. She is a passionate student advocate who helps them access the resources and support they need to thrive. She is also a leader and willing volunteer who works to create a more inclusive environment at Suffolk for students, employees, and stakeholders. She has served as a co-leader of the Black Faculty and Staff Employee Resource Group. And she co-led the Ambassador for Inclusion Professional Learning Community. She also was the driving and visionary force behind Suffolk's Take Advantage Program, designed to support students of color and reduce systematic barriers to success, which helps students become more aware of programs and support services on campus from tutoring to counseling. In recognition of her outstanding service and dedication to Suffolk University and our students, we are pleased to present the Suffolk University Black Excellence Outstanding Staff Award to Jennifer Blakely.

All right, so I'm already crying, so I'm not gonna make it (laughs). So, I'm gonna keep my comments short, but thank you to SUBAN and the Celebration of Black Excellence Planning Committee for this award. I'm humbled and honored to receive it. Sorry.

The work that I do here at Suffolk, both inside and outside the library has brought meaning to my life and I'm grateful, sorry, to work alongside Joyya Smith and many others to make an impact on the lives of Suffolk students,
the Black and,
the Black Faculty and Staff Employee Resource Group
And I'm grateful for their friendship.
Again, thank you for this award.
And I'll continue to do you my best
to make Suffolk a place where people feel comfortable
and are able to thrive.
(audience claps) Thank you.
<v ->Alrighty. Good evening, everyone.</v
My name is Kerimal Suriel Guerrero
and I'm a second year law student and the president elect
of the Black Law Students Association.
(audience cheers) (laughs) Thank you.
This evening, I have the honor
of presenting the Suffolk Law School
Black Excellence Outstanding Alumni Award
and the Suffolk Law Black Excellence Outstanding Faculty
and Staff Award.
This year's recipient of the Suffolk Law
Black Excellence Outstanding Alumni Award is
the Honorable Serge Georges Jr.
(Kerimal laughs) (audience claps)
I'm also told that today is Justice Georges' birthday.
So happy birthday (laughs).
(audience claps)
Judge Georges is a highly respected associate justice
of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court
and a revered adjunct faculty member
at Suffolk University Law School,
where he has taught and inspired a generation of students.
Two fundamental principles have defined
Justice Georges' career,
a commitment to both the rule of law
and to a fair and equitable justice system.
Justice Georges is a 1996 graduate of Suffolk Law
and his Alma Mater honored him
with an honorary doctor of law and his, a degree in 2021.
A self-described nerd who loves reading the law
and thinking about how to apply it,
Justice Georges is noted for his legal brilliance,
but what sets him apart in both the courtroom
and the classroom is his deep humanity
and his commitment to treating everyone
with dignity and respect.
The son of Haitian immigrants,
he grew up in Dorchester,
not far from the Boston Municipal Courthouse,
where he later served as an associate justice
from 2013 until 2020
following a successful career in private practice.
He also presided over the Dorchester Drug Court
from 2014 to 2018,
and both experiences inform his work
on the Supreme Judicial Court,
where he contributes a personal understanding
of how communities of color navigate the legal system.
In recognition of his many outstanding accomplishments,
including his extraordinary impact
on the Massachusetts justice system
and the law students he teaches and mentors
and in anticipation of his continued success
and positive impact,
we are honored to present the Suffolk University Law School
Black Excellence Outstanding Alumni Award
to Justice Serge Georges Jr.

(I'm gonna take my phone out, 'cause Caitlin said, if I go over three minutes,
she's gonna rush up here and take me out.
On my birthday.
Despite some, over the years, having a pretty high profile,
you know that I actually don't prefer
to be the center of attention.
And when you celebrate these kinds of nights,
it's always easiest and more appropriate
to celebrate not necessarily who I am and what I've done,
but the amalgamation of who I am with all of the people
in the room that helped me get to where I am
and who I am.
Because when you think about some of the things
that you've tonight, and in particular,
what struck me was Rachel and Rachel's story.
And it goes back to a couple years ago,
I had the privilege of serving as the keynote speaker
of the Black Excellence Awards Night,
I believe it was back in 2019.
And one of the things that I could not do for you
that I still cannot do
for you is define for you what Black excellence actually is.
So, what I did that night
and what I'd like to remind you of are,
not necessarily some definition
that you can walk out here and say, "Now I know what it is."
It's more so the characteristics of what Black excellence is
that I'd like to remind you of.
All of the things that you heard
about my introduction might make you think
that it was an upward trajectory
that always kind of led to this.
But I am much like Rachel,
where my life and my trajectory has been more like an EKG.
And yet, through the help of a lot of the people in this room and the love and support and the encouragement of the people in the room, I have managed to achieve a level of success that someone who doesn't know me might say, "Oh, that's great." Look how hard he worked and look what he did, look how excellent he is."

But the reality is, it's a thin line between standing here and standing out there. And so, I want to remind you of one thing that's very fundamental, of what I reminded the folks that were there in the room with me a couple years ago about one of the primary characteristics of excellence. It is what you heard Linda talk about, opening a door for somebody else, helping somebody else.

If you are in my class, every once in a while, I will send you an email and I will always end it the same. If you can, today, help someone. And that is a nod to a friend of mine from college who passed. And every time I'd go and I'd see Anthony Pallotto and he'd go about his business, and it was kind of odd when you're 18, 19, 20, 21 years old, I will send you an email and I will always end it the same. If you can, today, help someone.

And Anthony died some years ago and I took that and I remembered that. And I encouraged that, because in the words of Hillel the Elder and I heard it from the first time when I heard former Prime Minister of Israel, Golda Meir say it, "If we are for ourselves only, then who are we?"

Now, what you might hear and what you might say, I'd like to leave you with a couple of things. One is my brother Ernst Guerrier. I had the pleasure and the honor of coming into Suffolk in August of 1993 and being met with the Mayor of Suffolk University Law School.

And I'd watch him. I'd watch him go around campus and I'd see the smile and I'd see the gregariousness and I'd see the personality. And I would see the guy that you all are gonna meet in a few minutes.

And I just remember him coming up to me and saying, "Hi, I'm Ernst. Who are you?" And because we're Haitian, you can spot a Haitian.

Haitians can spot Haitians. And he was like, it was,
it was two things that I learned because of that moment.
One, he was unabashedly Haitian,
(audience laughs)
where there are times when you are of immigrant backgrounds
where you might want to recede to the background
and not have anybody know that you're not from here,
or you're from a different culture,
or you speak a different language, you eat different food,
and sometimes it might cause you to shrink.
And he caused me to rise.
And as he did that, he also did one other thing.
He went to his locker and he opened his locker.
And somehow, he had made,
there were like five Haitians at Suffolk,
but he had 3,000 t-shirts made
that had the Haitian flag on the front.
(audience laughs)
And on the back, it said,
"100% Haitian, no additives, (audience laughs)
no preservatives, no chemicals."
(audience claps)
And he gave me that shirt and he made me so proud
and that had a greater purpose.
And I love you. I respect you.
And I look up to you.
Linda Forry, our families did grow up together.
And when you think about, again,
what you might hear in our bios and where we come from
and what we do,
what you don't see is the VFW Parkway and the Heartland.
You know, it's all Star Markets and Stop and Shops now.
And all the independent supermarkets were,
that were part of our fabric are gone,
but there was one on the VFW Parkway called Heartland.
And right next to it was a laundromat.
And every Sunday, our families would go
to do the grocery shopping and the laundry
and Linda was in diapers,
running around, and her little sister.
(audience laughs)
And when I think about those times
where our families were there,
just trying to get by and to have seen you grow
and to see you shine
and to see your family grow and shine.
(speaking foreign language)
I am, I am so proud of you.
I would encourage you,
all of you, you have an opportunity to do something great,
and that is to help someone.
You have managed to make something of yourselves
and make opportunities for yourselves, make them for others.
01:05:44 You heard me be described as an associate justice
01:05:49 of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court,
01:05:51 the oldest Supreme Court in the Western hemisphere,
01:05:54 operating under the oldest constitution
01:05:59 in our United States.
01:06:00 And you might say, "Man, he was a good lawyer.
01:06:03 Man, he was a good judge."
01:06:05 But the reality is I was a judge
01:06:07 of the Boston Municipal Court.
01:06:08 When you talk about some of the things that would keep us
01:06:10 from being there,
01:06:13 candidates of color, over the years,
01:06:14 had to go up a certain vertical.
01:06:17 If you were a judge of color,
01:06:18 they wanted to see you go up through the minor leagues.
01:06:21 You had to go through the trial court,
01:06:22 then maybe to the superior court,
01:06:24 then maybe to the appeals court.
01:06:25 In history, there hasn't been anyone to go
01:06:27 from the community courts where I was
01:06:29 to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court.
01:06:31 And you might think that says,
01:06:33 (audience claps) No, I,
01:06:35 I'd ask you to hold your applause because you might think
01:06:38 that is somehow an indication of how great I am,
01:06:43 but it isn't.
01:06:45 There are plenty of people that could be in this position.
01:06:47 And there are plenty of people who didn't.
01:06:50 And the reason being is because they never thought
01:06:53 to give someone like me a chance
01:06:55 without somebody else in the room
01:06:58 saying, "Give him a chance."
01:07:01 And that someone is in this room
01:07:04 and he's already been honored and he's sitting right there.
01:07:07 His name is Tony Richards.
01:07:09 So,
01:07:10 (audience claps)
01:07:15 I want to leave you with these two last things.
01:07:18 Up until two months ago, when I had lunch with Tony
01:07:22 at Carrie Nation, I had never met him ever.
01:07:27 And during the time that I was being vetted
01:07:29 for the Supreme Judicial Court,
01:07:31 I know that he was in Governor Baker's office and ear,
01:07:36 saying, "You need to give him, this is the guy.
01:07:40 This is the person."
01:07:41 We had never shaken hands. We had never broken bread.
01:07:44 We had never sent a text. We had never said hello.
01:07:47 And he was working his behind off to see me get here.
01:07:51 So when you see me, I, again, remind you,
01:07:54 I am an amalgamation of everyone,
01:07:58 every good, everything to help me get here,
01:08:01 which is why I continue to give and give and give and give
01:08:05 because I've gotten and gotten and gotten and gotten.
01:08:09 So last summer, I was able to take my daughter Olivia
with me to the court. And I sat in court doing work while I looked over while she was laying on my couch with her iPad, just playing. And it was normal to her. It was normal that she was sitting in her dad's office at the SJC on her iPad. And I thought to myself and I almost cried because it isn't to say that perhaps we didn't have these dreams. It's that we didn't see them in three dimensions. So as a parent, looking at my child, hoping for a better day for her, I say to you, Mr. Richards, whatever you were doing in your household, you did something quite right. So, sir, I say, I celebrate your Black excellence. To all of our honorees and the committee, Chairman Lamb, President Kelly, I thank you. And I promise you I ain't going anywhere. <v->Oh.</v> I didn't wanna interrupt the sentimental moment. Congratulations, Justice Georges. I will now present the Suffolk Law Black Excellence Outstanding Faculty Award. This year's recipient is Professor Loletta Darden. Professor Darden is the Director of Suffolk Law's Intellectual Property and Entrepreneurship Clinic, which provides pro bono legal services to small businesses, inventors, artists, and entrepreneurs, who would otherwise be unable to afford comprehensive IP legal representation. This year, Bloomberg Law featured the IP clinic's victory over a large international corporation on behalf of a small family business. Loletta teaches courses, such as intellectual property survey, trademark law and patent law. Her scholarship focuses on IP rights for creators and inventors, particularly those who are under resourced. Her book, "US Patent and Trademark Office Law and Practice," is forthcoming from Aspen Publishers this year. And her paper on sequential trademark rights was selected by Thomas Reuters as one of the best intellectual property articles of 2021. Prior to, yes. Prior to joining Suffolk, Loletta was a partner and manager
She also served as Chief IP Counsel for Duracraft Corporation, where she managed all IP litigation. She has participated in several precedent setting cases, including Atlantic Thermoplastics v. Faytex Corp and Micron Separations, Incorporated v. Pall Corporation. In recognition of her outstanding service and dedication to Suffolk University Law School and our students, we are pleased to present the Suffolk Law Black Excellence Outstanding Faculty Award to Professor Loletta Darden.

Good evening, everyone. I'd, first of all, like to thank the committee for this award. I am truly honored and I'd like to thank also President Kelly and Chairman Lamb for setting such strong leadership for the university, for the law school. I'd like to shout out to the law school leadership, Dean Perlman, Associate Dean Kim McLaurin, who's here tonight, giving us such supportive opportunities here in the law school to mentor and support our students. I also thank Dean McLaurin for giving me the opportunity because she was the one that hired me into Suffolk, giving me the opportunity, giving me this opportunity to do what I love, which is to prepare our next generation of leaders and trailblazers. Who knows? We have, somewhere in this university, in the law school, the next Ernst.

I also want to thank a special person who's not here tonight, because without her words, I would not be here. I want to thank my grandmother because she spoke my destiny into being when I was only seven years old. When I was in high school, you see, I was told by an educator that I would never succeed in my dream of becoming an engineer and forget being a lawyer. But my grandmother knew different, even though she and my grandfather never attended school, neither one of them, they both were illiterate. They saw something in me and she would always say, "That's my lawyer."
Every time, I'm, I had a cousins who went off to nursing school, but she would never point to me and say, "That's my nurse." She said, "That's my lawyer." Every chance she got, she would say, "That's my lawyer." My grandfather started saying, "That's my lawyer." And honestly, I never thought about being a lawyer. (audience laughs) So understanding the power of words, I've dedicated my life to ensuring that all who dare to dream, especially those that look like me, have a cheerleader, a mentor, a voice in their ear that says, "Yes, you can achieve.

You can be that which you dream to be.

You can do that which you dream to do." I challenge all the educators in this room.

I challenge all the community leaders in this room. No matter where you are in life, I challenge you to become voices of hope, inspiration, and vision for someone else. We need that, particularly in this time, where there's such great efforts to divide us based on difference, to divide us based on our past, to erase the past. In a time where just basic human rights and dignity are being ignored, I challenge us to all stand up and be that voice of inspiration for someone else.

Again, to the committee, I thank you for this honor. Thank you all. (audience claps) Congratulations. (audience claps) (paper flutters) (audience laughs) I hope everyone is enjoying themselves tonight.

This is, (audience claps) This is like, (audience claps) this is like a family reunion, right? Only the reunion is with Serge and Linda, (laughs) Ernst? And you just invited us to your party. Right? (laughs) So, before I talk about the man of the hour, I noticed Cherina and Sharice. I called on you earlier. You weren't here.

Listen. I was working. Listen. I said that, I said that.
I said, those two are always supporting us and always advising us. But listen, I had to call you out. I'm sorry. (audience claps) You're past honorees. You're past honorees. Look at Cherina. It's okay. (woman laughs)

So listen, I wanna say thank you to all the presenters this evening and a big heartfelt congratulations to all the award recipients. You are all more than deserving. I am proud to share this moment with all of you tonight. Right now, I want to invite the SUBAN Leadership Committee up to the stage.

And as they're walking up, I'll just wanna say that I have the distinct pleasure and honor of presenting the Suffolk University Black Excellence Trailblazer and Icon Award. Thank you. Thank you. This person is a true personification of Black excellence. So peacefully pleasant, warm and welcoming, a very approachable and kind soul. His personality is irresistibly infectious. It is hard not to feel his energy when you're around him. And that smile. Let me see it. (audience laughs) That smile is so bright. You can see, you can see him coming a mile away with that smile. He is one of the most positive, optimistic people you will ever encounter, always seeing opportunity and possibility in everything. His kindness is unlimited and immeasurable, always showing care and concern for others. He is extremely encouraging and supportive. He is a mentor. He is a sponsor. He is a teacher, a coach. He is an irreplaceable, cherished friend, and I'm not gonna cry. He pushes us to do more, to be better, whether it is going for that bigger, a desired job, or investing and taking risk. However, accolades cannot be touted without mentioning his unwavering dedication and his selfless generosity to Suffolk. He has paved a path for so many of us here at Suffolk in the legal arena, and now, in the real estate arena. He is a legal luminary turned real estate mogul, blazing trails, shining light, looking back, pulling others up. We are truly grateful to have him as a pillar
of the Black community,
of the Suffolk community,
and of the greater Boston community.
He was recently recognized by Eastern Bank
for both his ability as a lawyer
and his business acumen in real estate.
His entire portfolio represents investments
in the Black community in and around Boston.
He is an unstoppable force that is spreading love
of his people, and sharing his knowledge and experience,
always encouraging and helping and supporting.
He is a rare, irreplaceable gem who we cherish tremendously
and appreciate greatly.
He is Ernst Guerrier.
Born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti,
he came here,
his parents migrated to the United States
and he came here at just the young age of seven years old.
He is married to his lifelong love and beautiful wife,
Marie Flore Guerrier, who works on the front lines.
She works on the front lines as a nurse practitioner.
They have two wonderful children,
Christa Hope Guerrier and Myles Guerrier.
Ernst is a double Ram, earning both his bachelor's degree
and law degree from Suffolk.
He also earned an LLM in taxation from Boston University.
Upon completing his graduation degree,
then Suffolk President David Sargent recommended Ernst
for admission to the law school.
Ernst was awarded a merit scholarship
from the Richard Trifiro Foundation.
The scholarship enabled Ernst to his studies
at Suffolk Law School
and realize his dream of becoming a lawyer
and an advocate for education.
Since 1997, Ernst has been the principal managing partner
of Guerrier and Associates PC.
In 2018, Ernst founded the Black Alumni Network,
aka SUBAN, to celebrate Black excellence and achievement.
Oh, wait a minute.
And achievements at Suffolk University.
Ernst is also a founding member
of the Suffolk University Law School Dean's Cabinet
and presently serves on the Suffolk Board of Trustees.
Ernst has continued the Trifiros' legacy
at Suffolk University with his philanthropy.
Along with his wife, Marie, he established
the Suffolk University Black Alumni Network Scholarship,
funding it with a hundred thousand dollars,
just last year, jump starting it,
so we can start giving scholarships.
Ernst has worked closely with the university and is always willing to assist with the recruitment of Black students and students of color. For his leadership, his mentorship, his dedication and commitment to Suffolk University, it is with great pleasure that I present, that we present the Trailblazer, the Black Excellence Trailblazer and Icon Award to my friend and brother from another mother, Ernst Guerrier. (audience claps)

(group laughs and chatters)

We've been doing this for how many years?
How many years we have been doing this?
It's too much.
It's too much. I know.
(group chairs)
Okay, just everybody come forward.
Get a few.
(group chairs)
Okay. (audience claps)
Congratulations.
Thank you.
(audience claps)
Good evening.
Audience>Good evening.
You know, there's not much you can say after an introduction like that, right?
But I'm deeply humble to receive such a prestigious award.
Thank you, SUBAN.
Thank you, Tamela.
Thank you, Hind, madam chair.
Thank you, President Kelly, Chairman Lamb, Marge, all of you are here.
The best way I can address you tonight is to just basically tell you stories.
It's no coincidence that all these things are happening at Suffolk under the leadership of Marisa Kelly.
(audience claps)
And I say that because, perhaps, I should start on how this story began.
Prior to Marisa being here, we were a divided camp.
She came in and addressed our issues head on, provided us with a platform.
That enabled us to celebrate us tonight.
And by me saying, "Us,"
I mean, all of us.
So again, I say, thank you to my friend, Dr. Marisa Kelly.
(audience claps)
Thank you Tamela, for your leadership, your vision.
It's easy to start something, but it's one thing to grow it to what it is today.
Your leadership, that, and Hind, is beyond any words that I can use tonight.
So, thank you.
I'd also like to thank all of those who are involved,
Professor Jenny Joseph-Hayle, my friend, Kim McLaurin,
Dean Cherina Wright,
Caitlin Haughey, my right hand at the school.
She's my everything, the go-to person each and every day,
and everyone who's involved
or who was involved in the selection process.
Sometimes we make the mistake
of thinking exactly what Serge just said.
When we give an award to someone, it's because you,
we think they did something
that's extraordinary or excellent.
I can tell you, in my case, that is not the,
that is not the case.
I stand here as beneficiary
of a whole lot of people who sacrificed for me.
And again, I choose to address it tonight
by telling you stories.
Serge, I love you for the man that you are,
for the father that you are, the husband that you are.
You mean more to me than I can ever express.
So, let me tell you the stories.
Serge is two years behind me.
So, I graduated and did not pass the bar.
And I took the bar again and did not pass.
And I am at my lowest point that you imagine.
"Hey, E, man! You didn't pass?"
"Nah, man, I didn't pass."
"Listen, this is not going to define you."
I'm like, "Serge, man.
This is not the time."
He's like, "Listen, man, I find this guy.
He's gonna tutor you. He's gonna do this."
I'm like, "Serge, man.
I just got the news," but he wouldn't stop.
He forced me to pick up the phone, make the necessary call.
And of course, I went on to pass.
That is exactly what we do.
When we are down, and we just pick up one another.
Now, lemme tell you the second story about Serge.
Just last year, I was asked to lead,
to be the Marshal of the Graduation.
So, right before the ceremony started, Chairman Lamb said,
"Let me just show you guys the path."
As we were walking through Fenway Park, Serge says,
"Ernest, let's just stop."
And we hugged in the middle of the infield and he says,
"Can you imagine this, man?"
Two Haitian kids
(audience laughs) in the middle of Fenway Park,
a place that did not allow Black folks.
And here I was, the Marshal,
and Serge was the keynote speaker.
How could this happen?
Only because people who are different than us saw us as equal and gave us that opportunity.
So, once more, I would like to thank President Kelly, Chairman Lamb, the Dean, and the leadership team for giving us that opportunity.
Thank you.
I'm proud, (audience claps)
I'm proud to call you a friend.
And while I'm on the subject as, of friendship, thank you to my friend, Senator Linda Dorcena. We are childhood friend.
And when I called Linda and asked her if she would be the keynote speaker, the immediate answer was, "Yes,"
followed with a two hour visit in my office in which we talk about our children.
You know?
And if you ever see Linda and I at the supermarket, then just go into another aisle, because we'll be there for a while, right? (audience laughs)
I love SUBAN
I love Suffolk.
Suffolk has left a tremendous image in my life.
I completed my undergraduate degree here, as well as my law school.
I came to Suffolk because it gave me an opportunity, but also for what Dr. Kelly said earlier, because of the principle on which this university was founded.
It was founded for people like me who were not blue blood, who dream of becoming a lawyer, can also get an education.
I can tell you as a trustee, it is and remain true to the core.
I came to Suffolk because it gave me an opportunity, for what Dr. Kelly said earlier, because of the principle on which this university was founded.
I can tell you as a trustee, we work extremely hard to maintain opportunities for those who will follow.
And I can tell you, sometimes we fall short,
but under the leadership of Dr. Kelly and Chairman Lamb, that I'm giving a voice to continue to advocate for you all, to continue to advocate for people that look like me.
And I've never been told that it's not acceptable.
Again, I'd like to thank them.
(audience claps)
My two degrees have opened many doors for me and my family.
It has allowed me to have a successful law practice in Dorchester, where I'm from.
It has allowed me to give back to my community and it has allowed me to help others.
Yet, that is simply not enough.
We are talking about individual success.
As Serge said, to whom much is given, more is expected.
So, I must do more.
It's not only to just better myself and my immediate family,
but what am I doing for my community?
So, issues such as affordable housing
and access is important to me,
but there's only one way that I know how to do that.
And that is education.
So tonight, once more,
I'm pledging to continue to work with SUBAN.
I'm pledging to continue to work with the university
to raise money for scholarship for our existing students
and those who will come.
We talked about recruitment.
So tonight, I invited a young woman that I'm trying
to recruit to the school.
I hope Naldene is here.
So, I can't see, you know,
and then Jennifer Cruz,
so who just got accepted.
I think, yesterday or the day before.
I'm hoping she accept that acceptance.
(audience claps)
But truly, I am grateful for every single person
who has played a major role in my life,
you know, and some of them are here.
You know, as Serge stated earlier,
it's easy to just celebrate someone
after something has happened.
But I just wanted to remind you,
I don't know how to say, "No."
I don't know the word quit.
So, just so you understand,
I was nominated five times to become trustee, five,
and on each and every occasion, they said, "No."
I can remember my good friend, Kim McLaurin,
her disappointment, when she called me.
And she says, "I just don't understand."
And I said to Kim, "It's just simply not our time."
If it's about service,
then we just need to continue to do what we need to do.
So again, it was no surprise
when Marisa Kelly and Chairman Lamb came in
and Amy Nechtem was elected,
then all of a sudden, things change.
So, I'd like to thank my good friend Kim McLaurin
for championing the cause of pushing my candidacy.
I would like to thank my a,
my good friend, Judge Bolden,
who as a student, saw something in me
and asked that I get involved
and stayed with me throughout the process.
I would also like to thank my family,
my mother who's not here,
my mother who never had the benefit of education.
01:36:08 She never went to school, 
01:36:11 but my two sisters and I have nine degrees between us. 
01:36:14 (audience claps)  
01:36:22 And when I talk to you about friendship and stories, 
01:36:26 when my mother passed, 
01:36:28 the first call that I received was from Serge George.  
01:36:32 Serge was there with me at the wake, at the funeral. 
01:36:36 And he said to me, says, "Ernst, I know you. 
01:36:40 This is not gonna hurt you right now, 
01:36:42 but the first mother's day, 
01:36:45 that's when it's gonna hurt you."  
01:36:47 And 6 o'clock in the morning, who did I get a call from? 
01:36:50 Serge George. He says, "Brother, I'm here for you."  
01:36:54 And that's true friendship. 
01:36:58 My two sisters, Marie and Elizabeth, 
01:37:02 you two have looked up to me when I don't deserve it. 
01:37:07 I thank you.  
01:37:10 (audience claps)  
01:37:11 My friend, (audience claps)  
01:37:15 my friends in the alumni, I'm sorry,  
01:37:17 my friends in the development office, Karen, Colm, Jeff,  
01:37:23 who sat with me before my interview and said,  
01:37:25 "Man, I know you're passionate, 
01:37:28 but maybe you ought to answer these questions 
01:37:30 a different way."  
01:37:31 (audience laughs)  
01:37:32 You know, Caitlin,  
01:37:35 who enthusiastically supported my nomination then,  
01:37:39 my good friend, Donna Grand Pre,  
01:37:41 I don't understand why she keep taking my calls  
01:37:44 because it's always a request about,  
01:37:46 "Please, please, please,  
01:37:48 you know, take a another look at this application.  
01:37:52 You know, this students didn't receive enough money"  
01:37:54 or something, but thank you.  
01:37:57 My two law partners, Jim and Tony,  
01:38:00 without them I cannot imagine practicing law.  
01:38:06 To many others  
01:38:07 that I just simply don't have enough time to thank,  
01:38:11 of course, Kim McLaurin is very near  
01:38:13 and dear to my heart.  
01:38:15 Last, but certainly not least,  
01:38:18 and certainly first is my wife, Marie.  
01:38:22 Marie, please know you are the reason I get up every day.  
01:38:26 You are the reason the sun rise and the moon bows.  
01:38:30 You are my light and my guide.  
01:38:33 For the past 25 years,  
01:38:36 you have allowed me to walk behind you and call you my wife.  
01:38:42 Our union bore two children, Christa and Myles.  
01:38:47 I received credit when most of it are due to you.  
01:38:51 And again, because I tell stories,  
01:38:53 I gotta tell you one last one.  
01:38:56 I remember my very first real estate venture.  
01:38:59 It was a $2 million purchase, and we had nothing.
And I look over the numbers and everything, back in 1991, '92, '93 or whatever it was, $2 million was a lot of money and probably still is today. And I looked over the numbers. I took the book to bed with me and I'm looking at all the cap rates and everything. And it got to be 11:30 at night. Marie turned around and she says, "Buy the damn building." (audience laughs) I said, "Are you sure?" She says, "No, but I'd like to go to sleep." So, I went out, I bought the building for $2 million. That's probably worth, you know, 10 times more today. So again, Marie, I remain grateful for all you do for me and our children. I don't want to take too much of your time. I just would like to congratulate all the honorees tonight. I'd like to say, thank you to SUBAN, the selecting committee once more. It is truly an honor to receive this prestigious award. I'm certain I don't deserve it, but I thank you anyways. <v ->I left my phone up here.</v><v ->I was supposed to text my son and tell him he better be watching. Because I'm gonna quiz him when I get home. </v>

Ernst, let me just say this. I know so many people, and this is not scripted. I'm sorry. I have to say this. I know so many people that Ernst has helped, lawyers who had a hard time or graduates who have passed the bar and had a hard time finding work or found work and didn't like it, and you know, were kind of in a state of limbo and Ernst always gave them a place to work. I mean, countless, I know countless people. I say, "Where you work?" And they say, "Up here, Ernst Guerrier's law firm" I'd say, "Wow."

And you know, I thought about it. And I realized the significance of that, especially back then, when it would be harmful to someone to, or, you know, a negative on them, if they had gaps in their employment history. So, to have someone to give you a job,
to give you something to do
where you could say, "Fill that space,"
and you deserve all the accolades, all the awards.
I mean, we're so grateful for you.
You know that I am.
I'm grateful for your wife
and her cooking.
(audience laughs)
So I know I need to close. Folks are hungry.
You gotta use the bathroom. I know I need to go.
So, I took some notes.
I left my phone up here
when Ernest was talking.
Linda and Serge talked about, what is Black excellence?
All the honorees talked about ancestry.
A couple of folks mentioned that we stand on the shoulders
of our ancestors and talked about their grandparents
and how they inspired them and spoke, right?
Spoke into them.
We talked about action.
Help someone today, Serge, I'm sorry.
I know I should call you Justice Serge Georges.
The Js are just jacking me up.
So, forgive me. (audience laughs)
We didn't get where we are by ourselves.
That was a common theme.
Policies, practices, create change,
first, lean in, be uncomfortable,
and the power that we have to help others and make change.
I want to congratulate all the awardees and recipients,
again, thank you to President Kelly and Linda
and all the speakers this evening.
And so, I did have some scripted nuggets
that I wanna leave you with,
some points to ponder about Black excellence.
Black excellence is an ancestral declaration.
We talked about that.
It is hats off to our ancestors,
those who have come before us,
who sacrificed and paved the way.
Black excellence, at least in my view,
is a clap back to historical and sometime present exclusion,
to racism, to prejudice and all the inferiority
and stereotypes imposed on the Black community.
We talked a little bit about this too.
Black excellence is Black representation,
and that matters.
Black excellence elevates
and amplifies Black representation,
which enables the up and coming generations
to aspire to greatness.
I have three points.
This is my third.
Black excellence is just not about the first, and those who accomplish the unimaginable, or those who achieve the highest positions and get the big accolades. Although, they should certainly be recognized, like we're recognizing them tonight. I think a few of the honorees talked about how hard they had to work. And as Black people, we're taught from a very young age and we're required by the greater society, at a very young age, to be a hundred times better, to do more, to work harder, work longer. We have to be unicorns quite often. And it seems that Black excellence for some, or for many, means Black exceptionalism, of course, striving for big goals and aiming to improve and be the best in any arena is, of course, admirable and worth celebration. After all, that's why we're here today, but Black excellence should not be about the individual. And I think we've all said that. It is not about just you. It's not about me. It not about just our individual achievements. It's about the community and how we affect the collective. Well, I'm gonna define Black excellence. Again, Black excellence is power and it is how we use that power that matters. We have to be intentional, take action, be deliberate about using our power to uplift the Black community and the community at large. Suffolk has committed to doing this. There's many programs in place, and they have put many programs in place and I've read about it on LinkedIn and many different places. So, let's change the narrative. Let's be the change. After all, Black people have always been culture drivers. Right? We're change agents. So with that, as we close the program, I ask you to join me in giving back to Suffolk, alumni connection and contribution is pivotal, and it makes Suffolk the school that it is, which is a great school. So, give back your time and your talents to our wonderful students, serve as a mentor, hire them for internships and for jobs, support the students financially by making a contribution to the SUBAN Scholarship Fund, stop by the registration table, make your gift or purchase a t-shirt. The proceeds of t-shirt purchases will benefit the SUBAN scholarship. I want to thank you all for being here.
Thank you again for the planning committee, the SUBAN leadership committee, Caitlin and Anna Maria in the office of advancement, we can't thank you enough. This wouldn't happen if it were not for you and thank you to the sponsors, National Grid, that's where I work, by the way. I told them, I said, "Listen." McLane and Middleton and Karen Blum as, as well as our annual SUBAN scholarship corporate sponsors, Toll Brothers and Health Peak. I encourage you all to make your way to the lobby for networking, fellowship, food, and drinks, and some music by the Suffolk Jazz Ensemble. Thank you.