

00:06  
- Good morning everyone.  
00:09  
President Kelly, Dean Perlman,  
00:11  
board of trustees members and chair Lamb, Dean Smith,  
00:16  
thank you for those wonderful remarks.  
00:19  
Distinguished faculty, administrators,  
00:22  
proud parents, family, friends  
00:26  
and esteemed graduates of the class of 2020,  
00:29  
congratulations to you  
00:31  
(crowd applauding)  
00:36  
I can't tell you how delighted I am  
00:38  
to be here celebrating your exceptional achievement  
00:43  
of graduating last year  
00:45  
in the midst of a pandemic  
00:47  
that forced you to prove your grit.  
00:51  
Make no mistake about it.  
00:53  
What you accomplished during your years  
00:55  
at Suffolk law school  
00:57  
and since then is truly remarkable  
01:00  
and this is just the beginning.  
01:03  
I want to thank president Kelly and Dean Perlman  
01:05  
for providing me with the opportunity to address you today  
01:09  
along with graduate Conor McElroy  
01:11  
who you'll be hearing from shortly  
01:13  
and awarding me this tremendous honorary degree.  
01:17  
With its thriving day and evening programs,  
01:20  
Suffolk law is known for providing an excellent education  
01:25  
and training its diverse and talented student body.  
01:29  
Suffolk is also known for its very successful  
01:32  
and accomplished alumni  
01:34  
who have gone on to do great things  
01:37

in the private sector, government and judiciary.

01:40

In fact, president Biden just recently nominated

01:44

one of your own judge Gustavo Gelpi

01:47

from the US district court in Puerto Rico

01:49

to sit on the first circuit court of appeals.

01:53

Yes of your own.

01:54

(crowd applauding)

01:56

It's a real honor to be here

01:59

and I very much appreciate being recognized

02:01

by this wonderful institution

02:04

for my work in the justice system

02:06

that I've dedicated most of my life to.

02:10

I also want to take a moment though

02:11

to acknowledge the family members and the guests

02:14

in the audience

02:15

and those watching online today.

02:18

I know the tremendous sense of pride

02:21

that you all felt a year ago

02:23

when your loved one was received their diploma

02:25

despite the difficulties that they encountered

02:29

but seeing your graduate today,

02:32

finally in their cap and gown

02:34

in this beautiful historic venue,

02:37

well most undoubtedly it must be a dream come true

02:41

after many, many years of school

02:43

and certainly many student loans.

02:46

In all sincerity,

02:47

I hope that you feel a shared sense of accomplishment

02:52

because each of you has played a role in their success

02:56

through your love, your support and your guidance.

03:01

In my position when I was us attorney,

03:03  
I was very fortunate and still I'm very fortunate  
03:06  
to speak before many different audiences  
03:08  
but the opportunity to speak to graduates,  
03:11  
especially those with whom I share the legal profession,  
03:16  
is very meaningful to me.  
03:19  
It gives me hope that in sharing my personal story with you  
03:23  
about the path that I've traveled  
03:25  
and the choices that I have made  
03:28  
to lead me to where I am today,  
03:30  
that you will realize  
03:32  
that despite life's challenges and adversity,  
03:36  
you can overcome them to find your happiness, your success  
03:41  
and your mission in life.  
03:44  
As I prepared for today's commencement address,  
03:47  
I asked myself what inspirational words of wisdom  
03:51  
can I impart to you?  
03:52  
What would I have wanted to learn or hear  
03:55  
when I was sitting in your shoes?  
03:57  
And then I realized I was never in your shoes.  
04:02  
You are a class like no other.  
04:06  
Last year as we were heading towards spring  
04:09  
and all of you were focused on finals  
04:11  
and bringing your law school years to an end  
04:13  
and studying for the bar exam,  
04:15  
everything came to a halt.  
04:18  
Last March when schools, government agencies,  
04:21  
businesses, restaurants and travel essentially shut down,  
04:26  
we were all paralyzed in place  
04:28  
as we figured how to move forward  
04:30  
in the face of an unknown virus  
04:33

that was extremely contagious,  
04:35  
spreading fast and causing great illness  
04:39  
and loss throughout the world.  
04:43  
As you adjusted your lives  
04:45  
to living almost completely remotely,  
04:48  
the realization that your last year at Suffolk law school  
04:52  
would be nothing like what you had imagined,  
04:55  
that must've been so hard  
04:58  
and then as spring turned into summer,  
05:01  
we all were confronted with the gravity  
05:04  
of systemic racism and social injustice  
05:06  
as we struggled to understand tragic murder of George Floyd  
05:14  
and the number of unjustified shootings  
05:17  
by police of unarmed black men and women.  
05:21  
We found ourselves also living in a country  
05:25  
that continued to grow more divided and unaccepting,  
05:31  
especially as we underwent  
05:33  
last year's presidential election.  
05:38  
Given this environment,  
05:39  
you should feel tremendous pride in the determination  
05:43  
that you have shown to get here today.  
05:46  
Not only where you were able to graduate last year  
05:49  
but you also have to take a bar exam  
05:51  
that was made all the more stressful  
05:54  
because of the delays  
05:56  
but the news is that despite those delays  
06:00  
and the anxiety that they engendered,  
06:02  
your class had the highest passing rate  
06:06  
in the last six years  
06:07  
and that's a lot to be proud of.  
06:09  
(crowd applauding)

06:20  
Now, in fact, as president Kelly noted,  
06:26  
most of you have been working remotely  
06:28  
at law firms in house,  
06:31  
government agencies with prosecutorial  
06:34  
and legal aid offices  
06:35  
and for the judiciary accomplishing great things  
06:39  
but many of you haven't yet even met,  
06:42  
may not have met your supervisors or colleagues  
06:45  
face to face  
06:46  
and while things are opening up  
06:48  
and we seem to be getting back to a new normal,  
06:51  
a lot remains to be seen  
06:53  
about how our short-term lives and careers will go.  
06:58  
You don't know what life will bring  
07:00  
because in the coming months, years and even decades,  
07:03  
each of you will follow plans and unplanned paths.  
07:08  
Your careers will be guided by many things  
07:12  
from your personal life to your changing interests  
07:15  
and to what may be happening worldwide.  
07:19  
Graduates, I am living proof  
07:22  
that with hard work and perseverance  
07:24  
you can accomplish anything that you set your mind to  
07:28  
and I say that with confidence  
07:30  
because when I look out at you  
07:32  
I am reminded of myself so many years ago.  
07:36  
You know as a young Latina girl,  
07:39  
growing up in the housing projects of Spanish Harlem  
07:42  
in New York city,  
07:43  
I could never have imagined that in my lifetime  
07:46  
I would be delivering a commencement address.  
07:49

All I was sure of was that I yearn to be a lawyer  
07:52  
when I was in high school.  
07:54  
It was watching  
07:55  
a lot of "Perry Mason" episodes on television  
07:58  
that inspired my passion.  
08:00  
Now that's the "Law and Order" show of my time  
08:04  
for those of you who have no clue who Perry Mason was or is.  
08:09  
I'm the oldest of five children  
08:12  
and my parents are from a small town in Puerto Rico.  
08:15  
Neither one of them spoke any English when I was born  
08:19  
and both of them had limited education,  
08:21  
not even a high school degree.  
08:23  
They moved to New York city for a better life  
08:26  
and even though my parents had very little,  
08:29  
they instilled in me certain values  
08:31  
that emphasized working hard and studying hard  
08:35  
and I'm sure many of you have lived through that motto.  
08:38  
They taught me that education  
08:39  
would be the key to my success and happiness  
08:43  
and for me, they were right.  
08:44  
I was the first one in my family to go to college  
08:47  
and after that,  
08:48  
my passion led me to law school  
08:50  
and a career primarily in public service.  
08:54  
There were of course challenges along the way.  
08:59  
I was a Hispanic woman in a predominantly male field  
09:03  
but I saw the fact that I was a Hispanic woman  
09:05  
of modest circumstances  
09:07  
not as a hurdle  
09:09  
but rather as an opportunity,  
09:11  
an opportunity to excel,

09:14  
to break down barriers  
09:16  
and to hopefully make a difference.  
09:19  
It was with that in mind that as you heard,  
09:21  
I launched my career  
09:22  
at the department of justice in Washington.  
09:25  
I then was a prosecutor at the Middlesex DA's office  
09:29  
and then I joined a small firm  
09:31  
to become a criminal defense lawyer.  
09:33  
My life at that point in time  
09:35  
was certainly going according to plan.  
09:38  
I was an eager young attorney honing my skills.  
09:40  
I was a wife and a mother to two little girls.  
09:44  
I had reached a point in my life  
09:47  
when I was at the top of the world.  
09:50  
I thought I had it all,  
09:52  
certainly success the way I had always thought it would be,  
09:58  
but there were some things in life  
10:00  
that you simply can't predict  
10:02  
as you all now know too well.  
10:05  
Never could I have prepared myself  
10:08  
for my husband's cancer diagnosis at the age of 34,  
10:12  
battling that horrific disease for eight years  
10:16  
until it took his life almost 21 years ago.  
10:22  
I was left devastated  
10:25  
and not knowing what my next steps would be  
10:30  
but slowly I began to pick up the pieces  
10:33  
with the support of the love of my family,  
10:37  
my friends, my colleagues.  
10:40  
One of my bigger supporters is my husband of 10 years now,  
10:44  
Tom Dolan, who's up there supporting me again  
10:48

but I think the real reason he's here today  
10:50  
is he couldn't pass the opportunity  
10:52  
to be in this great ballpark  
10:54  
and facing the monster in the field.  
10:59  
I was a federal prosecutor  
11:01  
at the US attorney's office  
11:03  
when the position of us attorney became available  
11:06  
under president Obama's administration  
11:08  
and it was an honor  
11:10  
and a privilege when he appointed me  
11:12  
to serve as the chief federal law enforcement officer.  
11:17  
In particular because I was the first woman  
11:19  
and the first Latina  
11:20  
to serve in that role in Massachusetts  
11:23  
and looking back at those seven and a half years  
11:25  
as US attorney  
11:26  
I could not have been prouder  
11:28  
to have been part of the department of justice family.  
11:32  
A lot of my time back then  
11:34  
was spent on criminal justice efforts  
11:37  
that focused on prevention and intervention  
11:40  
and on being smart on crime,  
11:42  
not just tough on crime.  
11:46  
Civil rights enforcement was also a top priority  
11:49  
and I take great pride  
11:51  
that I established the first civil rights unit  
11:54  
as you heard earlier at the us attorney's office.  
11:58  
In that role I had the privilege  
11:59  
of working with the most talented  
12:01  
and devoted law enforcement officials in this country  
12:05  
and that was evident



12:06  
during the weeks following the horrible events  
12:09  
during the bombings at the marathon  
12:13  
A day that...  
12:14  
You know the Boston marathon  
12:15  
is a day that was typically reserved for celebration  
12:19  
of our patriotic heritage.  
12:21  
That was the most challenging case  
12:23  
and most difficult week during the tenure, my tenure  
12:27  
in which I met countless of individuals,  
12:30  
innocent victims, survivors  
12:34  
who exhibited strength, courage and resilience  
12:38  
as they faced hardships among them.  
12:42  
On that day of April 15th, 2013,  
12:47  
two bombs exploded  
12:48  
near the finish line of the Boston marathon  
12:51  
and on that day,  
12:52  
this city was shaken to its core  
12:55  
but Boston did not falter.  
13:00  
Ordinary people chose to act and risked harm  
13:02  
to help others  
13:04  
as well as professionals who risked their lives  
13:06  
to save others and to restore peace to our community.  
13:10  
There were many examples of people coming together  
13:13  
when we needed it most  
13:15  
and if there is anything  
13:17  
that I have learned from that event  
13:18  
is that people when needed,  
13:21  
we all come together and look out for one another.  
13:24  
You saw countless examples of that during the pandemic  
13:28  
and when it came to the marathon tragedy,  
13:31

many of the survivors and their family supported one another  
13:34  
during the course of that case  
13:36  
and continue to do so today  
13:39  
through a number of foundations that they have established  
13:42  
for support and remembrance.  
13:46  
Surrounding yourself with people who believe  
13:48  
and support you,  
13:50  
not being afraid to ask for help,  
13:52  
never giving up on what you want to achieve  
13:55  
and acts of kindness,  
13:58  
all of these things can enable you  
14:00  
to overcome whatever life may throw your way.  
14:04  
As you leave here,  
14:07  
there are many ills facing the country  
14:09  
which the pandemic exposed  
14:12  
relating to race, wealth and class.  
14:16  
We learned painfully that your zip code  
14:19  
could determine your chance of being offered a job,  
14:23  
receive healthcare, be incarcerated or succeed in life.  
14:30  
As emerging lawyers,  
14:31  
you will have the opportunity  
14:33  
to address the challenges posed by racial inequities,  
14:37  
the widening economic gap, climate change  
14:41  
and intensifying political divide.  
14:43  
You are young lawyers in the legal profession  
14:47  
at a moment of profound change.  
14:51  
You may be tempted to criticize the failure of government  
14:54  
or worse to sit silently by  
14:58  
but that is not what Suffolk law prepared you to do  
15:01  
and in fact, that's what we heard president Kelly  
15:04  
really talk about earlier.

15:07  
I have no doubt actually  
15:10  
that the foundation laid by Suffolk law school  
15:13  
has given you the tools to make a difference  
15:15  
and meet your full potential.  
15:17  
Remember that as you strive to achieve success  
15:20  
in whichever way you define it  
15:22  
and accomplish your goals,  
15:24  
giving back to your community should be part of the plan  
15:29  
and many of you, most of you have exhibited that already.  
15:32  
It is easy to be cynical  
15:35  
and to think that the system is stacked against you  
15:38  
but change happens from within,  
15:40  
especially in addressing the necessary reforms  
15:44  
that we need in law enforcement and in government.  
15:49  
There's no question that responding  
15:51  
to these challenges may seem like a Herculean task  
15:55  
but as Martin Luther king once said,  
15:58  
"Never never be afraid to do what's right,  
16:02  
especially at the wellbeing of a person  
16:05  
or animal is at stake.  
16:07  
Society's punishments are small  
16:11  
compared to the wounds that we inflict on our soul  
16:14  
when we look the other way."  
16:17  
So dear graduates,  
16:19  
you cannot look the other way  
16:22  
and most of you have not.  
16:25  
Your voices, your passion, your commitment, your diversity  
16:29  
and your vision  
16:30  
are desperately needed  
16:32  
to build a more equitable and just society  
16:35

and you have never been better prepared

16:37

because you are a class like no other.

16:41

That is your mission

16:42

and that class of 2020 is your responsibility

16:45

so congratulations and thank you

16:47

for allowing me to share this moment with you.

16:51

Thank you. (crowd applauding)