

# Suffolk University Law School

Sunday, May 22, 2022

Leader Bank Pavilion

Commencement Student Speaker

Sarah Howie

Good afternoon, and welcome friends, family, members of the Boards of Trustees, esteemed faculty, deans, and staff of Suffolk Law, President Kelly, and my fellow graduates.

Congratulations, Suffolk Law Class of 2022.

If you think back to the last day or orientation, you may remember a promise, that if we worked hard we would get to sit here today. We would accept our JDs and walk into the world ready to make some positive change. What they didn't tell us was that this would be the wildest, strangest, most challenging three years of our history. Certainly decades of law students before us experienced bumps in the proverbial road. But we got 2020, and 2021, and we've all seen how today has gone so far.

I'm not sure about any of you, but I did not have two Supreme Court justice confirmations, a global pandemic, two presidential impeachments, billionaires in space, or Tom Brady winning a Superbowl with another team on my law school bingo card. If you were lucky enough to start in 2018, you even got a third Supreme Court confirmation out of the deal. Behind us now are the days filled with Zoom School of Law, waiting patiently for whatever elevator decides to work that day, and pretending like we are very interested in an event for something other than the free food. No matter when your time started at Suffolk, we survived all of that, and now we're here in front of our friends and family, on one of the most important days of our lives.

Across from the front doors of our beloved Sargent Hall is a constant reminder of the weight of our choices. The Granary Burying Ground represents how working tirelessly toward our goals, whatever they may be, is not in vain. Walking out of those doors, we came face to face with the reminders of revolution, of resilience, and of perseverance. Each time we came into the building, we passed by the final resting place of those who, just like us, were compelled to change the landscape of their world, and change it they did.

All those years ago, a group of individuals came together for a common purpose. They saw the injustice facing them and decided it could not be ignored. They did as we did when we were forced to completely change the way that we expected to be law students. They fought, they adapted, and they built something extraordinary.

When we were young, we were taught about these events as a snapshot in time, a bullet point on the timeline of civilization. The older we get, the more obvious it becomes that most issues cannot be boiled down to a single moment or an individual challenge. It's complex, and it's messy. But change? Change is different. Change can start with one person, one shot, one opportunity. With the right fortitude and some bravery, a single voice can stand up and declare what the rest of us are thinking but are too afraid to say out loud: that the world we live in can be improved if we just choose to act.

As we walk across the stage today, we join the distinct world that is the practice of law. The piece of paper we receive is more than a hard-earned juris doctor. It will proclaim to the world that we are the ones who society can turn to, to make a difference. Being a lawyer puts each of us in this position every single day because that is the nature of the profession. That position, of course, comes with great responsibility. The world and an individual life can change in an instant.

Being dependable and level-headed in a crisis is crucial to becoming a great lawyer. Whether it's an unfathomable crisis, a negative history, an unpredictable event, or an impossible outcome, this profession is unlucky enough to have seen most every challenge. It's us, though, the doers of the world, who must continue to meet every challenge head on. Advocating for our clients, our laws, and our Constitution requires finesse, a strong will, and a touch of grace.

What makes us equal to the challenges before us is that we leave Suffolk with the tools to handle a crisis and a candor rarely seen in this world today. We will use our tendency towards tenacity to solve the problems that face us. By our words and our actions, we can resolve conflict. We can speak up against injustice. And when necessary, dissent.

As the late John Lewis reminded us, we can make good trouble. We must wield that power both carefully and confidently. Just like the revolutionaries whose names are forever etched on the tombstones of the Granary Burying Ground, we must adapt, improvise, overcome, and persist.

Our generation has the responsibility of changing the world for the better. I already know that we are ready to do just that. We are already extraordinary. We have already made history by being here today. We simply have to continue down this path.

When we finally step into the coveted role of attorney, let's consider what the names on those tombstones faced. We must commit ourselves to that example. So sign first like Hancock. Sound the alarm to injustice like Revere. Have a brewery named after you like Adams. Make your name something worth memorializing, because your legacy starts today. Thank you.