

Congratulations to the Class of 2023! You finally made it!! Ladies & Gentlemen, distinguished guests, students, President Nye, Members of the Board of Visitors, Dean Cornwell, Seton Hall Law School Alumni, faculty members and everyone here at the NJ Pac I wish to express my gratitude to you for being here this AFTERNOON and taking time out from your busy schedules to share this special occasion with us. I want everyone here to make some noise and recognize your Parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and significant others for the support they gave you!

This day is all about you and the accomplishment that you have achieved. You have worked hard to get here. Today a new journey begins.

I would like to share something with you. I came here today and was bestowed an honorary Law degree. It's the first time I ever received a degree from Seton Hall and didn't have to pay a penny for it. Isn't that great?

I did not come alone today. Let me introduce you to my outstanding federal law clerks. I introduce you to Eugene, Lili & Courtney and my court room deputy, Briana. My current interns are also here, Corey & Katherine.

I would also like to take the liberty of introducing my future summer interns, from Seton Hall —Marie-Eva Battle & Jusniye Cogur and inform them that for the very first time, they will receive a stipend from Carmen Mendiola, a successful Seton Hall Law graduate who leads the Carevel Foundation. They are learning today that they will each be receiving \$1,500.00 from the Carevel Foundation as paid Seton Hall interns at the US Federal Courthouse in Newark. Isn't

that great? I would like to challenge the Seton Hall Board of Visitors to find a way to support future Seton Hall Law students so that they too can receive paid internships at our federal courthouses.

This is an important day for the class of 2023 as we recognize you as our future leaders of America. I recognize the class of 2023 for your EXCELLENCE. Seton Hall Law School graduates are part of an enduring legacy where you are called upon to serve. It is important for you to remember that as future lawyers you are advocates for justice. It will be your job to uphold the rule of law and speak up when you see inequality in this world.

I stand before you as a fellow SH Alumna and am grateful to this great school for my accomplishments. Most recently SHL was ranked the 56th top law school in the nation, with the 11th Best Health Care Law Program and 12th best Part-Time Law Program in the country. Parents, I have great news for you. The bar passage rate is 81%. This means your sons and daughters have a bright future ahead of them and they will be able to get jobs and start paying back their student loans.

I would like to thank and acknowledge my dear friend & former Dean, Kathleen Boozang for her leadership and commitment to the school.

I consider this place to be my home and I am certain you too feel the same way. Never did I ever imagine that a girl like me from Hudson County, who attended public school and was the recipient of an Economic Opportunity Program grant would be selected to be a US Federal Court Judge. I stand here before you as only the Second Latina Federal District Court Judge

from the District of NJ and as the First Latina Woman to have served as President of the NJSBA in the history of the organization which started in 1899. I am the proud daughter of PR parents who came to live in NJ seeking opportunity, education, and a better life. They too were seeking the American dream. They came with very little, not knowing how to speak English, but had a desire to be the best that they could be.

I am honored to be a part of this graduation celebration. I remember fondly coming to the law school for the first time as a LEO student. I remember my professors, Angela Carmela and Paula Franceze. I know that they continue to be committed to educational excellence and we should all recognize them for their commitment to Seton Hall Law school. Professors, please stand up if you are here so we may recognize you.

On behalf of the New Jersey Federal Judiciary, I extend my congratulations to this graduating class of 2023. Your dedication and focus on your goals are admirable and will serve you well in the years ahead. I look forward to seeing you develop into great attorneys, judges, community leaders, and hope that one day one of you out there will join me as a future judge. Our country needs you.

Many of us here today come from diverse backgrounds. Our glorious DIVERSITY –our diversity of faiths and colors, creeds and sexual identity makes us who we are. I salute the SH members of LALSA.

For 30 years I have sought to uphold the Constitution and the rule of law in service to our community. My road to the bench was not a straight line. You see everyone has a calling. I

started off as a social worker. But I had a calling. And I followed my calling and wanted to be the best that I could be and became an attorney. I was a trial attorney who spent most of my time representing people who couldn't speak English, and were often viewed as the underdog, because they could not speak English, weren't educated enough, and had a different skin color.

This experience pushed me into the rising of my life. To quote from Maya Angelo,

“Just like moons, just like suns, with the certainty of tide, just like the hopes springing high, you will rise.” I managed to RISE and be here before you. You see, God had a vision for me, and he had a bigger dream, than I could possibly have dreamed for myself. Similarly, the Seton Hall Law School community has a vision for you and hopes that this graduating class of 2023 Will Rise. It is my hope that you will take up challenges during these difficult times and defend our country and our social institutions...when you see a wrong, inequality or injustice speak up for you have the power to change lives.

These are difficult and challenging times we are facing. We have seen people demanding social justice and change following the death of George Floyd.

Our world is at a turning point. The Global Pandemic has accelerated our world. It has forever impacted and changed us.

The global challenges before you are how to face the threats attacking our educational institutions, global war, social inequality, and climate change. I propose that this class will defend our nation with your advocacy skills and knowledge. Knowledge is POWER! Seton Hall

Law School has prepared you to go out and advocate for justice and fairness. Our country needs you to lead in the future with your intellect, your passion, and integrity.

Class of 2023 you are prepared for a New ERA.

You are the embodiment of the American Dream. As we enter this Memorial Day weekend, never forget our veterans and our ideals:

Freedom, God, Honor, Country.

The preamble to the Constitution reads “We the People” That means me and you. We must believe that something better is always possible if we are willing to work for it and fight for it. We must believe in the power of HOPE. This feeling of HOPE will allow us to rise above the voices of doubt and will help you overcome obstacles and be inspired to rise to be your best possible self.

I encourage you to become engaged in your government. President Roosevelt said, “the ultimate rulers of our democracy are not a President, a Senator or a Congressman, but the voters of this country.” In this country everyone is entitled to be treated fairly and have access to the courts. Yet, New Jersey finds itself amid a judicial crisis and the public has the right to have their cases heard in court. I call upon you all to help find a solution to this problem.

Class of 2023, something new is coming your way. New Opportunities, New Relationships. Doors will open. You did what was expected. You went to class, you took your final exams, you spent countless hours studying and briefing cases. Change has arrived. Where

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you are going is what matters—not where you have been. Leave behind regrets, focus on your future. New doors are opening—don't become a victim of your circumstances. Keep doing the right thing. Focus on what is in front of you and do not look behind you through the rear-view mirror. Fight for your future; We all have things that have come up against us in life—People who don't like you, parents that weren't around, depression, addictions, unhealthy childhoods, economic instability, illnesses. Yet something amazing is in your future. You need to step into your greatness. Class of 2023 you are History Makers, you will affect generations to come; every chain that has ever held you back is being broken. Influence and opportunity are at your doorstep allowing you to break into your Greatness. The right people will notice you and catapult you to a new level.

I can tell you that who you surround yourself with will be the key to your success! Build yourself and surround yourself with positive people, avoid those who will bring you down. Join a Bar Association. Remain active with your Seton Hall law school community as it is important to give back.

Refuse to be discouraged. Many famous people refused to be turned away and rejected: the famous author, JK Rowling lost her mother to multiple sclerosis, she was a single mother and a survivor of domestic violence. She was jobless, on public assistance, and was rejected by 12 publishers before her first Harry Potter novel was published. Today she is a self-made Millionaire.

We should learn from the story of Melissa Jefferson, A/K/A: LIZZO. How many Lizzo fans are out there? She is a talented flute player, singer, rapper, song writer and Grammy

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award winner. Before all that fame and money, she was living out of her car and homeless. Despite her economic setbacks, she was persistent and kept on knocking on doors, showing up for auditions and wouldn't take no for an answer. It is appropriate for me to quote from her most recent hit song as it fits this occasion, "In case nobody told you today, You're special, In case nobody made you believe, your special".

My advice for a successful legal career is to be persistent, have a plan and be patient. Having a positive attitude and saying Yes, I can do that will be the key to your success!

In closing, I would like to leave you this message. The biggest reward in my life has not been the financial benefits I have achieved. Yes, it's great having a wonderful wardrobe, great shoes and driving fancy cars...However, I have asked myself, what do I stand for? The answer is "A life of substance, through my service." I encourage you all to offer and challenge yourselves through service.

What is your truth? What do you stand for. Let's leave here today, wanting to create enlightenment in this world. Let people know that they are heard and respected.

It is an honor of a lifetime to serve my country as a Federal District court judge and as the judge's oath of office says to administer justice and to do equal right by all.

I encourage you all to put your talents for the common good of our communities. We are all in this together. May God Bless you all.

Thank you