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Legal, Legislative Leaders Awarded at 2021 Massachusetts Bar Association Annual Meeting

BOSTON, Mass. — The Massachusetts Bar Association presented its 2021 Annual Meeting on Tuesday, May 25, in a pre-recorded virtual ceremony held in lieu of the annual in-person MBA Annual Dinner due to ongoing COVID-19 precautions. The Annual Meeting featured a keynote address by Supreme Judicial Court Chief Justice Kimberly S. Budd and the presentation of the MBA Legislator of the Year Award, the MBA President’s Award, the MBA Gold Medal Award, the MBA Chief Justice Edward F. Hennessey Award, and two new special Access to Justice awards -- a Race, Equity and Inclusion Award and a COVID-19 Impact Award – which were created to highlight those who have gone above and beyond during these challenging times to address legal needs arising from the pandemic and civil unrest.

The following honorees were recognized at the Annual Meeting:

Access to Justice COVID-19 Impact Award: Nancy Baratta, Esq. and Ann Balmelli O’Connor, Esq. Committee for Public Counsel Services

The Access to Justice COVID-19 Impact Award is given to those who have created and implemented creative programs or strategies to provide legal services to address the legal needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Baratta and Balmelli O’Connor were honored for their work with CPCS’ Children and Family Law COVID Legal Response Team and their commitment to ensuring that justice was not delayed or denied for thousands of indigent parents and children.

Access to Justice Race, Equity and Inclusion Award: Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court’s Standing Committee on Lawyer Well-Being

The Access to Justice Race, Equity and Inclusion Award is given to those who have pursued zealous advocacy framed with a race, equity and inclusion lens. The SJC Standing Committee on Lawyer Well-Being was honored for its efforts to break down barriers to discussing racial equity and systemic racism in the Massachusetts legal community, particularly through its groundbreaking February 2021 Report Summarizing Affinity Bar Town Hall Meetings, which helped to elevate the voices of legal professionals from underrepresented, historically excluded and systemically oppressed populations.

MBA Legislator of the Year Award: Congresswoman Katherine Clark (Massachusetts-5th)

The MBA Legislator of the Year Award is presented annually to a state or federal legislator who has distinguished him/herself in public service through outstanding contributions to the legal profession, courts and administration of justice. Congresswoman Clark, who was elected as assistant speaker of the House of Representatives in December 2020, was honored for her firm commitment to access to justice since she entered public office, including her previous service as a state senator when she served as Senate chair of the commonwealth’s Joint Committee on the Judiciary and as state representative.

MBA President's Award: Thomas J. Carey Jr., Esq., Hogan Lovells and Boston College Law School

The MBA President's Award is bestowed upon those individuals who have made a significant contribution to the work of the MBA, to the preservation of MBA values, to the success of MBA initiatives, and to the promotion of the MBA leadership role within the legal community of Massachusetts. Carey was honored for his extraordinary dedication to the MBA, where he has been a fixture on MBA task forces and committees working to drive meaningful reforms within the Legislature and the judiciary. As chair of the MBA's Amicus Curiae Committee, Carey contributes to the MBA's strong voice on issues of importance to the legal community and the general public. He is also the founding chair and current co-chair of the Appellate Bench-Bar Committee, a member of the Massachusetts Law Review Editorial Board and a Brandeis Life Fellow of the Massachusetts Bar Foundation, among various other roles in MBA member groups.

MBA Gold Medal Award: Marsha V. Kazarosian, Esq., KAZAROSIAN COSTELLO LLP, Haverhill

The MBA Gold Medal Award is reserved for individuals who have provided outstanding legal services that have benefited the legal profession in Massachusetts. Candidates must have performed actions that have enhanced the image of the legal profession and the MBA, and that demonstrate a commitment to public service and the principles embodied in the MBA. Kazarosian, a past MBA president and current chair of the MBA's Civil Rights & Social Justice Section Council, was honored for her exceptional career as a civil rights and personal injury attorney. Known as a tenacious advocate for the underrepresented, Kazarosian has taken on several high-profile media cases throughout her career, including the 1999 landmark *Borne, et al. v. Haverhill Golf and Country Club Inc.*, which set a precedent for gender discrimination in a country club/membership-based setting.

MBA Chief Justice Edward F. Hennessey Award (presented posthumously): Chief Justice Ralph D. Gants, Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court

The MBA Chief Justice Edward F. Hennessey Award is presented to a federal or state court judge within Massachusetts who has upheld the highest traditions for public service, while demonstrating extraordinary leadership and dedication to improving the administration of justice. Gants, who died in September 2020 after serving as chief justice of the SJC since July 2014, was awarded for his efforts as an unwavering champion of equal access to justice and quality legal services for all the residents of Massachusetts who worked tirelessly to improve the administration of justice. Gants' wife, Professor Deborah Ramirez, accepted the award on his behalf.

Incorporated in 1911, the Massachusetts Bar Association is a non-profit organization that serves the legal profession and the public by promoting the administration of justice, legal education, professional excellence and respect for the law. The MBA represents a diverse group of attorneys, judges and legal professionals across the commonwealth.