



Committee on Diversity,  
Equity & Inclusion

2023 John E. Higgins, Esq. Diversity  
Trailblazer Award

# NOMINATION FORM



**Deadline**

October 19, 2022

## CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

# 2023 John E. Higgins, Esq. Diversity Trailblazer Award

Presented by the Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The New York State Bar Association's Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion seeks nominations for the 2023 John E. Higgins, Esq., Diversity Trailblazer Award. The Committee wishes to recognize exceptional efforts of a member of the legal community to promote the full and equal participation of diverse individuals at all levels of the legal profession.

Nominations will be accepted until **Wednesday, October 19, 2022**. Please e-mail a PDF of your completed nomination form and attachments to [eguerrero@nysba.org](mailto:eguerrero@nysba.org).

The recipient will receive a recognition award and a complimentary one-year membership in the Association.

### Criteria for the John E. Higgins, Esq., Diversity Trailblazer Award

Each Diversity Trailblazer presents a unique blend of experience (from up-and-coming to lifetime), skills, accomplishments, and other qualities. The Committee will consider the nominee's trailblazing efforts in one or more of the following ways:

1. Promoting inclusive workplaces, seeking to address the unique needs of those from diverse backgrounds, and advocating for equal opportunity for diverse individuals in the legal profession. For example, creating affinity groups, diversity committees, or otherwise increasing opportunities for diverse individuals in the profession, including the judiciary.
2. Supporting and encouraging diverse individuals to reach their professional and personal goals and ensuring opportunities for the advancement of diverse attorneys. For example, serving as a speaker, firm or association leader, or mentor or other participant in one or more pipeline programs.
3. Creating organizational change and establishing an inclusive work environment. For example, fostering leadership development, innovation and knowledge sharing aimed at enhancing the status of diverse individuals in the legal profession, providing research and study or development of educational programming on issues of importance to diverse individuals throughout the legal community.
4. Publicizing the distinct and vital contributions diverse individuals make to the legal profession. For example, promoting pro bono legal representation and service to diversity causes and announcing enhanced opportunities on behalf of diverse individuals in the New York State Bar Association or other bar associations, and advocating for the rights of those from diverse backgrounds.
5. Using power and resources to advance the position of diverse individuals in the legal profession and in their community. For example, exhibiting efforts to diversify the legal profession through community involvement, collaboration amongst members of the legal and civic community, and corporate or law firm commitments to diversity.

### Terms and Conditions

Attorneys that are licensed in New York State, whether practicing or not, are eligible. Nominees may be contacted for additional information or interviews.

## John Eric Higgins, Esq.



John Eric Higgins, born in Charleston, South Carolina, was a maternal grandson of the late John William Jennings, one of Albany's earliest Black attorneys and one of the first to integrate the Pine Hills residential neighborhood in Albany.

John's family moved to Albany and he attended the Albany Academy for Boys, where he was captain of the Varsity Football team. After graduating in 1979, he attended Hamilton College, playing D-III football all four years and receiving a BA in English in 1983. John then attended Albany Law School, where he became licensed to practice law in 1989.

In 1996, John married Katja Cecchetti Higgins, of Mogliano, Veneto, Italy. They lived in Albany, New York, raising two daughters, Jasmine and Isabella.

John began his professional work as labor lawyer soon after passing the New York State Bar Exam in 1990, first with Bond, Schoeneck and King; followed by Cusick, Hacker and Murphy; Nixon Peabody and ultimately Jackson Lewis. He practiced management-side labor law for 25 years and loved every year of it. John was an expert in discrimination law and received several awards for his passionate litigation skills, including Best Lawyer: Albany Labor Lawyer of the year (2015), and most recently Best Lawyers in America: Employment Law–Management, Labor Law–Management and Litigation-Labor and Employment (2018).

John also participated in the Albany County Bar Association; American Bar Association; National Bar Association; Capital District Trial Lawyers Association; New York State Bar Association, as Management Co-chair of the Labor and Employment Section's ADR Committee and Co-chair of the Committee on Minorities in the Profession. He was also President of the Capital District Black & Hispanic Bar Association from 2004 to 2009.

His service, talent and dedication to the legal profession were boundless as was his love for helping clients and colleagues statewide. He passed away unexpectedly in 2017 and in his honor and memory the New York State Bar Association Committee on Diversity and Inclusion has renamed its signature recognition award as the John E. Higgins, Esq. Diversity Trailblazer Award.

## Diversity Trailblazer Award Past Recipients

- 2022 – Evan Wolfson, Senior Counsel, Dentons
- 2021 – Hon. Tanya R. Kennedy, New York State Appellate Division, First Department
- 2020 – Kenneth Chin, Partner and Chair of the Banking and Finance Practice, Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel LLP
- 2019 – Hon. Sylvia Hinds-Radix, New York State Appellate Division, Second Department
- 2018 – Barbara Finkelstein, Chief Executive Officer, Legal Services of the Hudson Valley
- 2018 – Judge Sheila Abdus-Salaam, Associate Judge, New York State Court of Appeals
- 2017 – Judge Denny Chin, U.S. Court of Appeals, 2nd District
- 2016 – Christopher S. Auguste, Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel LLP
- 2015 – Tracy L. High, Partner, Sullivan & Cromwell
- 2014 – Darryl M. Gibbs, Lead Director and Associate General Counsel, Contract Management, AXA Equitable Life Insurance Company
- 2013 – Lillian M. Moy, Executive Director, Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York
- 2012 – Professor Jenny Rivera, City University of New York School of Law
- 2012 – Paul T. Williams, Jr., President, Dormitory Authority of the State of New York
- 2012 – Joseph Maron Hanna, Partner, Goldberg Segalla LLP
- 2011 – Hon. Theodore Jones, Associate Judge, New York State Court of Appeals
- 2011 – Sharon Y. Bowen, Partner, Latham & Watkins, LLP
- 2010 – Leonard M. Baynes, Professor, St. John's University School of Law
- 2009 – Laurie Robinson, founder and CEO of Corporate Counsel Women of Color
- 2008 – Taa Grays, Assistant General Counsel, MetLife
- 2007 – Carol A. Robles-Roman, Deputy Mayor and Counsel to New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg
- 2006 – Hon. George Bundy Smith
- 2006 – Hon. George Leighton
- 2006 – Hon. Carmen Beauchamp Ciparick



# Committee on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

## 2023 John E. Higgins, Esq. Diversity Trailblazer Award



### Deadline

October 19, 2022

**Candidate:** \_\_\_\_\_

Title (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Nominator:** \_\_\_\_\_

Title (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Has the candidate won any award recognizing his or her diversity efforts from any other organization?  Yes  No

If yes, please detail below:

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### Please attach/provide:

1. A supporting statement of no longer than 750 words, describing how and why the nominee deserves the Diversity Trailblazer Award. Include information that relates to the above criteria and other details, such as the quantitative and qualitative impact of the nominee's trailblazing efforts.
2. Letters of support from up to three individuals who would be willing to be interviewed to enable the Committee to learn more about the nominee.
3. Valid URL addresses and/or pdf materials of relevant press related to the nominee's diversity efforts (if applicable).