

**Remarks of Chief Judge Jon D. Levy on the presentation of the Morton A. Brody Distinguished  
Judicial Service Award to Hon. Patti B. Saris, U.S. District Judge for the District of  
Massachusetts, at Colby College, Waterville, Maine, November 6, 2022**

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The Morton A. Brody Distinguished Judicial Service Award honors a judge for distinguished service, but the decision of who should receive this honor is not arrived at by judges alone. The people with whom I served on the selection committee are named in your materials, so I will not repeat them now. But I would like to recognize those who are present in addition to me and Elizabeth Brody Gluck, and I ask that they stand. The Hon. Joseph Laplante, U.S. District Judge for the District of New Hampshire, Professor Patrice Franko, and Richard Uchida, Vice President, General Counsel and Secretary of Colby College. Thank you for your efforts which resulted in what is, in my humble opinion, a brilliant choice.

The more I have learned about Judge Patti Saris, the more I've come to believe that she is not only a model judge; she is a model person—or as my parents and, for that matter, Judge Brody might have put it—a true mensch.

Judge Saris is the product of the Boston Public School system, and the daughter of two loving parents, whom she credited in a published 2018 interview for giving her the vision to live the life she has since led:

“They were thrilled when I got married to such a nice guy and had four children, but they always expected me to have a career and to give back to the community. That was probably the biggest thing my mother and my father gave me.”

Judge Saris has been giving back to the community throughout her entire life. As I have studied her life and career, there are two words that I keep returning to: service and leadership.

Every position and office held by her has been in public service. From her clerkship, to serving as counsel to the Senate Judiciary Committee, then back to Boston as an Assistant U.S. Attorney and ultimately Chief of the Civil Division, followed by a judicial career, first as a federal Magistrate Judge, then as a State Superior Court Justice, and for the past 28 years, a U.S. District Judge. Judge Saris led the District of Massachusetts as its Chief Judge from 2013 to 2019, which included the period during which that Court addressed the Boston Marathon Bombing.

I commend Judge Saris' biography to you. Her philanthropic work, awards, assignments, election to the American Law Institute and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, her written

scholarship, and the various roles she has played in academia at the highest levels are, taken together, a sight to behold.

There's no question that Judge Saris found her calling in the law, and in Judge Saris, the law found a jurist of unlimited energy, spirit, and good will. I spoke to several people who know her well, and they all describe her in the same terms: a true humanist, with an unequalled work ethic, and, my favorite, a happy personality.

Judge Saris was nominated by President Barack Obama to serve as the Chairperson of the United States Sentencing Commission in 2010 and she served in that role into 2017. If it was President Obama's intention to tap a leader who would change the course of Federal Sentencing Law, he succeeded.

Judge Saris' leadership of the Commission displayed two critically important attributes: First, a commitment to have the Commissioners reach consensus about the changes that were needed to fairly and effectively adopt reforms in response to the era of mass incarceration of drug offenders and others from the preceding years.

Second, to do so based on the best evidence available. So much of criminal sentencing in the United States was historically based on intuition and prevailing morality. Judge Saris launched a new era, in which national sentencing policy is most guided by objective evidence.

The crowning achievement of her tenure as Chair was the 2014 Amendment to the Federal Sentencing laws known as the Drugs Minus Two Amendment which adopted an across-the-board reduction in sentencing levels for drug offenders. This change in the law was anticipated to prospectively affect the sentence of 70 percent of all drug trafficking offenders, reducing their sentences by an average of 11 months. Under Judge Saris' leadership, the Commission took the historic step of making the reduction retrospective, affecting the sentences of 32,000 people, and resulting in an average decrease of more than two years. These changes established two cohorts of offenders, those whose sentences were reduced, and those whose were not, which has provided the objective data needed for the Commission and Congress to better understand the relationship between the length of federal sentences and recidivism.

The research and recommendations made by the Commission under Judge Saris' leadership were also the foundation for the adoption of the First Step Act in 2018, which among many innovations, focused on reducing recidivism both through evidence-based risk and needs assessments of federal prisoners, along with the adoption of evidence-based recidivism reduction programming in the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The First Step Act also greatly expanded

the availability of “compassionate release” for prisoners whose personal circumstances and proven rehabilitation support a reduction in the length of their incarceration.

The First Step Act was enacted with broad bipartisan support. Let me repeat: The First Step Act was enacted with broad bipartisan support, representing a dramatic sea change in Federal sentencing law from where it stood when Judge Saris first joined the Commission eight years earlier. It’s fair to say that her leadership has transformed the nation’s political landscape regarding federal sentencing and incarceration.

Judge Saris has lived a life of service and leadership. She has been an extraordinary mentor to so many up and coming lawyers and future judges, including her former law clerk, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson.

Judge Saris, it is with profound respect and admiration that I present to you the 2022 Morton A. Brody Distinguished Judicial Service Award.