

## Gender Equality Breakfast to Feature Annie Kuster, Honor Nancy Richards-Stower

By **Meredith M. Lasna**

The Gender Equality Breakfast will kick off the 2026 NHBA Midyear Meeting on February 20. The Gender Equality Committee (GEC) is pleased to welcome former US Representative Annie Kuster (D-NH) as the featured speaker and to honor Nancy Richards-Stower with the Philip S. Hollman Award for Gender Equality. Both women have made extraordinary contributions to advancing gender equality.

Kuster's commitment to gender equality is rooted in her upbringing. Raised by parents who encouraged her to believe she could do anything, she broke barriers early in life. She attended Dartmouth College as part of the third class to include women, where female students were outnumbered 13 to one. She later attended Georgetown University Law Center, where women made up barely 20 percent of the class. In law school, she took a gender equity class taught by Eleanor Holmes Norton, the first woman appointed to chair the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Gender equality was a daily consideration that continues to inform her work today.

As an attorney, Kuster advocated for herself and other women in the profession. She challenged compensation systems at law firms and sought equal pay for women who were often more productive than their male counterparts but paid less. She recognized that women should not be held back by inequitable structures and understood that unequal pay has lasting consequences, including wider wage gaps, fewer opportunities to invest, and lower Social Security benefits. She saw that a firm failing to meet the needs of half its workforce was failing its business. Kuster demonstrated that it was possible to be a successful law partner while working part-time and encouraged others to challenge the status quo.

Kuster served as chair of the GEC and worked closely with Judge Philip Hollman on the Gender Equality Survey. She recognized then, and continues to emphasize today, that the absence of women litigators and judges leaves some voices and perspectives underrepresented in the justice system.

Kuster's advocacy continued through the 12 years she represented New Hampshire's Second Congressional District. She worked alongside colleagues on workplace and pay equity. Kuster also worked to expand access to childcare, recognizing that such policies help employers retain talented women. She was also a founding member of the Bipartisan Task Force to End Sexual Violence.

Kuster frequently highlights the contributions of women in New Hampshire. Trailblazers such as her mother, Susan McLane, ran for office and won, paving the way for other women to overcome barriers, lead all-female delegations, and attain the highest offices in the state. Women serving as judges, law firm leaders, and nonprofit heads continue to shape New Hampshire's professional landscape.

Gender equality remains central to Kuster's work. She encourages women to lift one another's voices, show respect, and mentor each other. She also urges employers to avoid short-sighted decisions. Careers are long, and policies such as family leave, flexible schedules, remote-work options, fair compensation, and an overall commitment to equity benefit not only women, but the profession as a whole.

At the breakfast, the GEC will present Nancy Richards-Stower with the Philip S. Hollman Award for Gender Equality. She served as a member and chair of the New Hampshire Commission for Human Rights, is a member of the College of Labor and Employment Lawyers, founded and served as president of the New Hampshire Chapter of the National Employment Lawyers Association, and has authored and presented widely on employment law topics. Until her retirement, she was a tireless advocate for employees facing discrimination, including gender discrimination, and continues to be a trusted resource for employment lawyers across the state.

We look forward to hearing from both women on February 20 and to welcoming the NHBA community in attendance. ♦



Kuster



Richards-Stower

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