

M.C. Sungaila Awarded 2017 Ellis Island Medal of Honor

May 15, 2017

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Haynes Boone Partner M.C. Sungaila is a recipient of the 2017 Ellis Island Medal of Honor, a prestigious award bestowed by the National Ethnic Coalition of Organizations (NECO) in recognition of her many accomplishments in the legal field and inspired service to the country.

Sungaila is one of several current and former Orange County-based honorees this year, including astronaut Dr. Buzz Aldrin and businessman and philanthropist Paul Musco.

The Ellis Island Medal of Honor has been recognized by both Houses of Congress as one of our nation's most prestigious awards. Seven U.S. Presidents have received the award, as have such esteemed Americans as Lee Iacocca, Muhammad Ali, Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, Quincy Jones and Rosa Parks. Individuals are chosen based on their demonstrated courage and compassion in helping those less fortunate.

"I am deeply honored to receive this award, as it reflects my commitment to professional excellence and lifelong passion for community service and providing legal services to those in need," said Sungaila, who received the award alongside fellow honorees at the May 13 award ceremony held at Ellis Island. She was nominated for the award by a prior recipient, Mariam Khosravani, the executive director of the Coastline Community College Foundation, on whose board Sungaila serves.

A member of Haynes Boone's [Appellate Practice Group](#), Sungaila has handled cases involving cutting-edge business issues, as well as numerous pro bono matters in which she has championed critical legal rights.

In 2016, for example, Sungaila earned a significant win in the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on behalf of Lucia Mondragon-Alday, a transgender woman from Mexico seeking asylum in the U.S. The court overturned an earlier decision by an immigration court, which had refused the woman's claim for asylum due to alleged past and potentially future persecution and torture.

In 2015, Sungaila was the lead appellate lawyer for parents in the first state appellate case in the U.S. to decide that a school district's fitness yoga program, scrubbed of spiritual references, did not constitute an impermissible establishment of religion under the U.S. and California constitutions. Some parents had objected to the program, contending that yoga was a gateway to Hinduism.

Previously, Sungaila claimed a significant victory before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which decided against Mexico for the unsolved killings and disappearances of young women in Ciudad Juarez. The decision influenced other human rights courts and the highest courts of other countries to extend similar protections to women and girls.

In 2016, the American Bar Association's president appointed Sungaila as a commissioner of the ABA Center for Racial and Ethnic Diversity, one of the core entities charged with advancing the organization's goal to eliminate bias and enhance diversity in the association, legal profession, and justice system.

The one constant in Sungaila's career has been her devotion to preserving the rule of law and providing pro bono services to the less fortunate, a commitment that has garnered her recognition from groups including California Women Lawyers, Alpha Phi International Fraternity, the Orange County Hispanic Bar Association, the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles, and Coastline Community College Foundation.