

**Acceptance Remarks by Alexandra Dapolito Dunn, Esq.
Upon Election to the Role of
President of the American College of Environmental Lawyers
September 19, 2025
Renaissance Boston Seaport District, Boston, MA**

Thank you so much to Immediate Past President Tracy Hester. It has been a tremendous pleasure to work with you on the College, and I so look forward to the next year gleaning your wisdom! Thank you to my fellow officers who are such great people. Thank you to the Planning Committee!

It is so wonderful to be here in Boston. A city I love because since I was very young, I have been coming to Boston – specifically to a tiny town on the North Shore called Rockport, where my parents bought a 200 plus year old house in 1975, and where my mom has lived full time for over 30 years. Some of you may know that from 2018 to 2019, I was the Region 1 Administrator and lived here, reverse commuting back to the DC area. New England is my happy place and to have all of you here in it – well it just got a whole lot happier.

As I look out at all of you I think well, we are quite a crowd. Top of the top. Passionate and driven. Diverse and committed to service. Ready to give back. We are environmental lawyers. Think about it. What a gift to work in this field.

We advise and counsel. We argue – persuasively and thoughtfully. We question. We challenge what is wrong and we advocate for what is right and we are all focused in so many different ways on protecting this incredible planet and its natural resources.

We work in states, in tribal nations, in small towns, and in enormous cities. We work at the federal and global level. Some of us work on the air, others the water, or the land, energy, oceans, species, on communities, on food systems, and most of us on the intersection of our human needs and the resources we have. Many of us are professors teaching the next generation - full-time or part-time. Raise your hands if you teach or have taught, or have even guest lectured. Look at us all. We are committed to the next generation.

What never ceases to amaze me about the College is the collegiality and friendships. We are truly Fellows. When I look out, I see mentors, guides, people who have given me a true helping hand in my career, life, practice, and without whom I absolutely would not be standing here. So, thank you. As I was preparing these remarks early this morning, or shall I say putting the finishing touches on them, I was

touched to receive an email from our Fellow Zach Miller in Colorado. You may remember that Zach missed last year's meeting due to a heart transplant, and he cannot be with us today as he is planning for a kidney transplant. But what he wrote is that he had fully planned to be here but for the timing of the surgery. And he expressed how much the friendships in this College mean to him. I told him I would cite to his note in my remarks because his desire to be with us, his commitment to the College, is testament to what we are all about – we really are deeply friends. He offered us a beautiful quote from the great Irish poet William Butler Yeats, appropriate for our Boston meeting. “Think where man's glory most begins and ends, and say my glory was: I had such friends.” Thank you, Zach.

Now, given that it is the age of AI, I thought it appropriate to ask AI – albeit ridden with guilt due to the environmental impacts of AI and wondering if we should start an AI use offset program – *what are common attributes of fellows in a professional organization?*

AI stated the attributes that bind us are:

1. Expertise and Achievement. *Yes.*
2. Our Commitment to the Organization's Mission. *Yes.*
3. We are seen as leaders or influencers, we mentor others, shape the Organization's direction, and represent it externally. *Yes.*
4. We have Diverse Backgrounds but Shared Interests. *Yes.*
5. We share Collaboration and Networking, Responsibilities, and offer Mentorship and Guidance to one another - leading to a sense of Community and Belonging. *Yes.*

Five for five. These attributes are all true of ACOEL and connect to two areas that I plan to focus on with you in the coming year.

First, I would like to work with all of you to raise the external profile of the College and our work.

We have so many wonderful writers on our blog, exceptional speakers, dynamic connections, this year we passed our first policy resolution. In some respects, however, we are still an unknown group. Having worked for several years on our mentorship program, and Co-Chairing the Outreach Committee, I know when we make connections we elevate our game and other entities are pleased to get to know us and to collaborate with us. We will find the right opportunities to shine our light outward, and we will have

some new tools to use to do this. One of them is our new website, which will be ready at the end of the year. Tomorrow over lunch I'll have a preview of the site for all of you.

Second, I want to focus on enhancing the level of service that the College provides to the Fellows.

This year we did surveys of what you all would like from the College in connection with the website redesign. What came through loud and clear is that you are looking for ways to connect with one another, to share ideas, and to network. We will be in a position to do this even better than ever before with our new member tool which will allow us to create interest groups and chat spaces, as well as to more easily find Fellows in our areas of interest. More to come on that tool tomorrow as well! And, we will be onboarding all year and integrating our Association Management Firm Potomac Management Resources or PMR. With penultimate thanks to our amazing friends from ELI, Jordan, Loretta, and Jen, and to Jonni from Accent who plans our meetings, on September 1 we entered an agreement with PMR and welcome Carol, Vickie, and Rebecca. PMR runs the offices of over 15 associations and organizations, many in the legal community. They will be our new team and will be helping the College and the Foundation run smooth ships.

So again, two primary goals for you –

- Raising the College's external profile, and
- Enhancing Fellow services.

One goal looks out and one looks in. Both are really important.

Now, my immediate family is not here as they are all where they need to be. I asked each of them for some words of advice that I could share from the podium as I take on this role.

From my husband of nearly 30 years, Chris: "Make your time a priority. Strike a balance. Work will continue every day, but if you don't take care of you, the quality of your work could suffer. Organizations that focus on quantity tend to fail at quality. Always be quality." Sound counsel from him.

From my son Sean, 22 and in graduate school at Ole Miss: "You can only control what you can control. Whatever is out of your control is not your concern. Do everything to the best of your ability, tomorrow's you will thank you. And always do hard things and strive to be the best version of yourself. If life was easy, nothing would be fulfilling or rewarding." A bit intense no? Can you tell he's a cross fitter and training for a marathon? Yes, he's getting a Master's in Athletic Training too. But also solid advice.

From my daughter Caroline, 25, an actress in New York City who this morning landed in Boston and is already in that little town of Rockport with my mom: “You never stop learning. Being in and leading such an impressive group of professionals, from all kinds of backgrounds, doing some of the most essential and important work right now, is one of the greatest opportunities you could have to learn. Keeping your eyes, ears, and heart open is necessary to help each other to keep protecting the Earth – and she seriously needs the help right now! Thank you everyone!!” Definitely words from the heart from my daughter.

And from my mother, 85.5 years young, right up the road, who did want to be here: “How does it feel to have 400 of the most prestigious environmental attorneys in the United States of America behind you watching every move you make? Take a deep breath and have fun!” To that I say, thank you mom, and as that does make me a bit self-conscious, to the rest of you, don’t stare at me too hard!

In closing, thank you everyone. You have my commitment that I will work hard for this College every day. I am passionate about it. I know you are too. I see this role as one of service to you and of service to the College’s mission. I look forward to offering you in the coming year, a wonderful and meaningful, a rewarding – a knock it out of Fenway Park – College experience.

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