



A Note from the Office of Dean Leonard M. Baynes

As we celebrate Pride Month in June, I reflect on the powerful words in the Declaration of Independence that “All Men (and Women) are created Equal” and our 250- year collective history where we have continuously strived to live up to that foundational principle. At the same time, I am reminded of the monumental progress that has been made by the LGBTQ+ community while recognizing that the pursuit of equality is an ongoing journey.

Like the many other heritage months that we celebrate, Pride Month is a moment to commemorate the courage, resilience, and contributions of the LGBTQ+ community through their advocacy amid adversity in making us a more equal nation. Their milestone victories have occurred in the courtroom and sometimes through legislation where diligent legal representation and advocacy were crucial.

The Stonewall resistance in 1969 led to early celebrations of Pride in the U.S. during the 1970s and 1980s. Pride Month was officially recognized in 1999, and the celebration expanded in 2009 and again in 2021.

The legal profession has a responsibility to ensure that every attorney, faculty member, law student, and others regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or background are free from discrimination. At the University of Houston Law Center, we value our LGBTQ+ students, alumni, faculty, and staff. So during this Pride Month, we take the opportunity to recognize one of our trailblazing LGBTQ+ alumni Congresswoman Julie Johnson; she is a 1991 Law Center graduate who represents the 32nd congressional district in north Texas. With her election, Johnson became the first woman to represent the district, and the first openly gay member of Congress from a Southern state.



Congresswoman Julie Johnson (J.D. '91)

Before obtaining national office, Johnson was a state lawmaker for Texas's 115th House of Representatives district from 2019-2025. During that time, Johnson passed 108 bills focused on patient protection and insurance reform. Texas Monthly selected her as “Freshman of the Year” in 2019 during her first year in the Texas House of Representatives and wrote that she “carried a variety of nuts and bolts legislation, including limits on predatory practices by insurance companies.” She was also named “Champion of Medicine” by the Texas Medical Association and received the “Big Voices for Little Texans” Award from Texas CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates), a non-profit organization that advocates for effective public policy for children and families in the child protective system.

Johnson’s journey to the halls of Congress is a powerful reminder of what’s possible in the U.S. for anyone of any background. It also showcases the power of legal education especially when grounded with individual purpose, determination, and commitment to public service.

The contributions and voices of our LGBTQ+ friends and neighbors strengthen our nation and our legal profession. During this Pride Month, I hope that we use this time to reflect on how far our society has come and the challenges that lay ahead by continuing to listen, learn, and work with each other of all backgrounds by building a legal system that continues to live up to its highest aspirations.

[Click here to see a slideshow of more Law Center leaders in the LGBTQ+ community.](#)

Sincerely,

Leonard M. Baynes
Dean, Hugh Roy and Lillie Cranz Cullen Distinguished Chair, and Professor of Law
University of Houston Law Center

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