

# Jennifer Cummings Hillery '00

## Outstanding Service Award



Jennifer Cummings Hillery believes in community-building and the power of personal outreach to change lives for the better. An elected official in the town of Reading, Mass., she is also a business owner and writer. As one of Reading's most prolific civic volunteers, Jennifer has helped elevate the quality of life there, particularly for families. She has successfully worn many hats, in addition to juggling the schedules of her three young children. She spent four years in the legal field, most recently as assistant district attorney for the Middlesex District Attorney's Office, all the while quietly cultivating a community that she believes helped her become the person she is today. For almost two decades, she has been an ardent Skidmore volunteer.

A political science major and Periclean scholar, Jennifer served as a vice president in the Student Government Association. In courses such as Constitutional Law and BU 107, she recalls, "I gained the skills and confidence to advocate for what I believe in. I've always had a spark in me, a desire 'to be the change' I wanted to see in the world. Skidmore helped fan that spark into a flame."

Deciding that a career in jurisprudence would be the most impactful way to make a difference, she earned a Juris Doctor degree from Northeastern University School of Law in 2004. She interned in the Criminal Division of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Boston before making her mark as assistant district attorney for Middlesex District Attorney's Office. Her impressive work in that role earned Jennifer the Justice Ruth Abrams Outstanding Attorney Award in 2007.

In 2008, after she and her husband Matthew welcomed their first child, Jennifer opted to employ her considerable talents closer to home. She joined the board of the Melrose Family Room, a gathering place for parents and their preschool children. When her son entered school, she joined the PTO as treasurer. In other leadership roles, Jennifer advocated for restoring programs cut from school budgets and fighting substance abuse. In 2015, she was elected as a member of the Town Meeting, Reading's legislative body. A tireless advocate for her constituents, Jennifer was part of a team that worked to secure the passage of a ballot measure to increase funding for the public schools and the police and fire departments. Last year she founded Speaker Sisterhood LLC, an organization that helps women become skilled, confident public speakers.

Jennifer traces her strength as an advocate and leader to transformational relationships with Skidmore faculty. She recalls "feeling inspired" while listening to Beau Breslin share his academic journey with students in his Constitutional Law class — over a home-cooked dinner with his family. "It was the quintessential small college experience. This simple, gracious gesture had a profound impact on my feeling of connection to Professor Breslin and Skidmore."

Jennifer also cherishes a lasting friendship with her Salvadorian roommate, **Ariela Suster**, with whom she bonded freshman year. They lived together all four years and spent holidays at one another's homes. "This experience expanded my worldview. I gained a greater appreciation of the different political and social climates that exist in other cultures," she reflects.

Jennifer has given back to Skidmore through a variety of volunteer roles. A longtime class agent, admissions contact and Reunion volunteer, she celebrates her 20th Reunion as fund chair and a member of the Alumni Association Nominating Committee. In 2020, Jennifer was selected to chair that committee as a member of the Alumni Board of Directors. She will oversee recruitment of board leadership for the next three years, a task that will have a considerable impact on Skidmore's future.

Humbled and honored by recognition for this work, she says, "Skidmore was and continues to be a home away from home for me. I grew so much here, academically and personally. I am grateful for the opportunity to deepen my connection to the College and the alumni community."