

John P. Lavelle Jr. '85

Bryn Mawr, PA

At-Large Alumni Trustee Candidate

The son and grandson of attorneys from the anthracite coal mining region of northeastern Pennsylvania, John Lavelle arrived at Princeton “wide-eyed and curious.” He considered studying engineering, but taking Latin to satisfy the language requirement steered him towards a concentration in classics. He loved the intimacy within the Department of Classics. “We had only 10 majors in our class, so you had to be an active participant,” he said. “There was no back bench in class to hide in, and I really loved that. Studying classics taught me how to think critically, listen with an open mind and understand the qualities that enable institutions to endure.”

Lavelle graduated from Harvard Law School in 1988 and clerked in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. Joining a Philadelphia-based firm in 1990 and putting down roots in the city, he connected with the local Princeton club. He volunteered to organize Princeton Club of Philadelphia events for recent alumni and was invited to join the board of the club. “The Princeton Club of Philadelphia allowed me to connect with Princetonians from different decades. Those relationships with people from all different walks of life who have a shared love of the University have been really meaningful to me,” he said. “The more I got involved, the more I wanted to continue doing it.”

His service extended to Annual Giving, where he organized telethons, served as class agent for three major reunions and was co-chair of the Philadelphia regional committee when it was awarded the Jerry Horton '42 Award for outstanding region in 2001. In 2016, he was honored

with the Harold Helm Distinguished Service Award, the highest distinction Princeton confers for volunteer service to Annual Giving. He also served as president of his class during its 40th Reunion and chaired the Committee to Nominate Alumni Trustees. Interviewing candidates for trustee whose character and achievements were “just breathtaking” was a privilege and a joy.

Lavelle said that “Princeton was where I learned that education is not merely an end in itself, but a call to service.” As a partner at the law firm Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, he specializes in representing clients in crisis management and complex litigation. He has also counseled clients on state and federal election and campaign finance laws and led statewide and regional voter protection programs for candidates and political campaigns. In 2024, he was part of the legal team that won a major voting rights case when a federal court ordered the State of Mississippi to redraw several legislative maps that unlawfully diluted the voting strength of Black Mississippians.

Lavelle has served as president of the boards at Community Legal Services and Philadelphia Legal Assistance, two sister public-interest law organizations that provide essential civil legal representation to low-income Philadelphians. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when the U.S. Department of Agriculture denied emergency Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to approximately 650,000 low-income Pennsylvanian households, Lavelle led the successful legal effort to secure more than \$700 million in food stamps for those most struggling to meet their basic daily needs. For this victory and other efforts, Lavelle received the Philadelphia Bar Association’s 2021 Citizens Bank Achievement Award for his work advocating on behalf of Pennsylvanians.

Lavelle serves on the advisory board of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, and as a judge pro tempore in the Philadelphia County Court of Common Pleas Civil Trial Division. "I have seen firsthand the profound difference that legal advocacy can make in people's lives," he said. "These efforts reflect my belief that the law should function as a tool for fairness, dignity and justice."