

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS TO THE PETER M. CICCHINO AWARD SYMPOSIUM & CEREMONY

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I want to welcome everyone on this momentous occasion and say it is my privilege to address you today. We all know Professor Cicchino, and today we celebrate the establishment of the Peter M. Cicchino Award for outstanding advocacy in service of the public interest. Later, we will be presenting the first awards to this years very deserving recipients.

Professor Cicchino joined the Washington College of Law faculty in 1998, and his dedication to public interest is certainly to be commended. He is a pillar in the legal community. We are privileged to have Professor Cicchino as a valued member of the WCL community.

After graduating from Harvard Law School and clerking with Justice Handler in New Jersey, Professor Cicchino served at the Urban Justice Center and for years provided legal services to the youth of New York City. He is a former Skadden public interest fellow, and in large part due to his influence and connections the Washington College of Law has established a public interest fellowship. We can see the hand of Peter in the creation of that public interest opportunity and in other service possibilities in our community.

Peter Cicchino also served as a staff attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union. This achievement, plus his personal interest in the law, makes him a welcome addition to the Washington, D.C. community.

This is not just rhetoric. The Washington College of Law is a school with a vision of human dignity, and we feel that our purpose is to be the voice of those who don't have voices, to accept every type of

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interpretation in a pluralistic framework. We must use power and strength to pursue this goal, to advocate diligently for the weak and the poor.

And from that point of view, Peter Cicchino's presence here was long overdue. He was not just an addition to the WCL faculty, but is squarely an enhancement. This conference takes place at a law school that was created by two women at a time when women were not allowed to practice law in most jurisdictions. Our founding mothers raised their voices to help women achieve equal rights in society. Building on that tradition and in the belief law plays an important role in building a society with opportunities for all, our founders' heritage has been expanded to include the pursuit of equal rights for all persons, regardless of race, ethnicity, or sexual preference. Peter Cicchino epitomizes the best of WCL's traditions. He encourages our community to focus on humanity. To borrow his words, for us to promote and rescue the issue of humanity.

As an international law scholar myself, let me explain why we need to talk about humanity. Between 1990 and 1997, the number infected with HIV and AIDS in the world more than doubled, from less than 15 million to more than 32 million. More than 150 million adults are illiterate. More than 250 million children in Africa may not reach adulthood. In this hemisphere we have millions of children who are sick. All of these people need to have vocal advocates, people who will complain and make the community aware. 1.2 billion people in the world earn less than one dollar per day. We all must raise our voices in outrage over these human rights violations.

Clearly, these are not problems that can be completely solved by lawyers alone, and certainly not by lawyers whose visions are narrow, and limited to a concept that our profession is simply concerned with technicalities. But this is not the vision of the Washington College of Law. Our vision is that, as lawyers, we can play an important role because there is hardly an issue that doesn't have a legal connotation or that is not related to questions of legitimacy and valid expectations of society. We can address these issues as lawyers because we have the knowledge of the institutions that can change society and the way in which life functions. We can certainly bring solutions to the table to solve these problems. Solving these problems may not be to simply eliminate poverty, but to provide opportunities for all members of the global community.

This is our philosophy for our Founders' Celebration this year, so how can we celebrate the founders without thinking of Peter

Cicchino? Let me read a portion of his essay entitled *Defending Humanity*. He wrote, “as I drew closer to my 40th birthday, I became even more convinced that there is only one important question from which all others flow. Of what does a good human life consist, and how do we go about getting such a life?” That question was pursued relentlessly and persistently throughout the book.

The declaration of human rights is a partial answer to this question if we additionally include a greater emphasis on family, education, safety, and a decent living wage. What is missing from this beginning and partial answer, is the message of humanity, of contributing and dreaming for a world where free men and women will work freely and develop themselves to the limits of their potential.

In order to commemorate this message of pro bono commitment, and Peter Cicchino’s dedication to the pursuit of that message we have created this award. Beginning today, we are going to be giving three awards per year to people who serve as examples for this community. Today, we are going to honor a dedication and commitment to pro bono work, starting with three deserving persons.

This event is just the first presentation of the Peter Cicchino Awards. This institution commits itself to celebrating public service, and we want to build on the examples of those in this institution who will contribute to creating a better tomorrow. For that reason these awards for outstanding advocacy in service of the public interest will be a permanent tradition of the Washington College of Law.

I want to thank all of you for being here, including this distinguished panel that is going to analyze the concept of humanity and intellectual basis of this institution and our community. I would also like to thank those who have made this day possible, our pro bono committee. Professor Jamin Raskin, with his relentless effort, has made a real contribution to our institution. I also want to thank all the other members of the panel that worked together to make this event possible: Richard Blum, Julia Gordon, Randall Kennedy, Julie Su, and Leti Volpp.

I want to thank you again for attending today’s conference, and please join me in honoring Professor Peter Cicchino.