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## Introductory Remarks

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# INTRODUCTORY REMARKS TO THE SECOND ANNUAL PETER M. CICCCHINO AWARD SYMPOSIUM & CEREMONY

LETI VOLPP<sup>\*</sup>

I want to welcome you to our Second Annual Peter Cicchino Conference. I am delighted to see all of you here. Peter would be so happy to see this crowd. I am truly grateful that Peter's parents, Pete and Mary Jane Cicchino; his brother, Billy; his sisters, Sally and Jane; and his partner, Jonathan Springer, could be with us today along with his friends, colleagues, and all of the students here.

Last year, when we held our First Annual Peter Cicchino Awards Conference, Peter was still with us. When Peter was alive, he was always present in a way that I am sure you remember: more engaged, more energetic, more brilliant, more witty, more compassionate, and more loving than seemed humanly possible.

It is truly difficult to fathom Peter's absence. I know I am in the company of a sea of thousands who have missed him terribly over the last several months. I would so love to know what he thought of the Presidential election.

Aside from his social commentary, we miss Peter as a teacher, a colleague, a friend, an intellectual leader, and as a moral voice in the fight for justice and equality. Many people are here today to share their thoughts about Peter, to discuss the impact he had, and the ideals that he held dearly. We will proceed with a panel discussion about two topics that were very near and dear to Peter's heart: the right to welfare and the work of public interest lawyers.

We chose these as the subjects of discussion because both were topics that Peter cared deeply about. As a member of the Society of Jesuits, Peter spent seven years working in soup kitchens, housing

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projects, and prisons before going to law school. He used his legal training to fight for the rights of the disenfranchised, eventually founding the Lesbian and Gay Youth Project of the Urban Justice Center in New York City, where he represented homeless and indigent gay and lesbian teens.

When Peter arrived to teach here at the Washington College of Law in 1998, he in no way abandoned his political commitments. He brought these commitments, his fierce intellect, the force of his personality, and his great love of teaching to his students in constitutional law, torts, jurisprudence, and sexual orientation and the law. In addition, Peter parlayed those same commitments, a rigorous analytical mind, and an unbelievable breadth of knowledge to fabulous scholarship through which his ideas are living on.

We honor his memory today by keeping alive his vision through reflecting upon the questions about morality, humanity, and justice that are raised by the right to welfare, and by invoking his spirit of commitment to working in the public interest.

We will start the panel by having Peter up close and personal. We all keep him in our hearts, but we will see him on video shortly in a clip from an interview that my colleague, Jamin Raskin, conducted with Peter in March of last year.