OPENING REMARKS: CSP 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OCTOBER 17, 2012
DONNA HAIG FRIEDMAN

Welcome and thank you for being here to celebrate the Center for Social Policy’s 20th anniversary and to honor five people whose exemplary leadership has advanced economic and social justice.

My name is Donna Haig Friedman; since 1998 I have had the honor of directing the Center and working with so many of you to carry out its reshaping poverty policy vision. I want to begin by recognizing those who contributed to the Center’s achievements over the past 20 years beginning with its founding directors, Murray Frank and Mary Grant. I also want to bring to mind Mary Ann Allard who was my immediate predecessor and who, at 46 years of age, passed away from cancer. I feel her presence here tonight. I would like for all those researchers, staff, faculty, students, consultants and constituent advisors who have worked with the Center at any time during these past 20 years to please stand and be recognized for your contributions to the Center’s success.

Our work, in partnership with you, matters. In our country, we have in place a lottery approach to opportunity; some win and many others lose.

16.2 million children in the US cannot count on enough healthy food to eat each day

In our state, 3,800 families are living in state-funded shelters and tens of thousands of others are living in unstable housing circumstances.

These realities have well-documented devastating consequences on the well-being of our children and communities.

The material side of hardship is not the whole story. Many of our poverty policies stigmatize. Men, women and children at times pay a heavy price for service receipt. Capacities, strengths and desires of families and social bonds within communities are put on the back burner or disregarded entirely. Listen to what George Paschal has to say about these matters. George is one of 50 co-authors of a book recently published by our partners from the Fourth World Movement; all of the co-authors were living in extreme poverty prior to Hurricane Katrina, were displaced and then found by FWM volunteers who engaged them over a three year period in chronicling their stories and insights. Julia Tripp, one of tonight's honorees, and I had a role in this action research documentation project as well.

“In our neighborhood we didn’t look at it like it was a rich neighborhood, but just a neighborhood we could call home, no matter where we go. And we never forgot that. You can take our neighborhood, but you can’t take away from us what we have kept from the neighborhood. It is like something we own. When you own something and you belong to something, nothing can replace that...It isn’t just the neighborhood or home, but it is the community. We love and cherish each other. You might need help here, ask a question there, but the neighborhood always comes together as one big family and that is where hope comes from.”
Over the past 20 years, the Center has contributed to solving poverty through multiple strategies, at times bearing witness to the humiliations of exclusion or laws/regulations that fail to incentivize paid work and the unpaid work of caring for our families. At other times, we serve as evaluation and learning partners to foundations, public agencies and nonprofits who are investing their financial and human resources in family and community change efforts. We also generate sound evidence to inform poverty solution formulation, an example being our most recent work for the Eos Foundation about to launch a significant, multi-year anti-hunger initiative here in Massachusetts; we conducted this research with our partners, the Mass Budget and Policy Center and the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute.

How we generate knowledge matters to us. We have worked over many years, as you will hear, to realize our aspiration of generating knowledge from the ground up, drawing wisdom from all corners, including most especially, those deeply affected by human service practices and planning, regulatory and resource allocation decisions aimed at poverty alleviation.

Tonight, we celebrate our past accomplishments and we draw upon the energy in this room and the inspiration of those we are honoring to propel ourselves into the next stage of the Center’s evolution. We have two very high priorities for the future --- which resources generated as a part of our 20th anniversary celebration will advance. We see these initiatives as ways to increase the Center’s impacts, crossing boundaries and building bridges in ways that contribute to creation of the kind of world we want to live in --- one which George Paschal’s words so powerfully described.

First, we will deepen our commitment to supporting and mentoring UMB graduate and undergraduate students, the next generation of social policy researchers. We will do this through establishment of the Elaine Werby Public Service Student Internship Program which you will hear about a bit later.

Second, we will move forward on design and development of a “Merging Knowledge” initiative in partnership with our friends from the International Fourth World Movement. This initiative will more deeply engage, in collaborative research and transformative dialogues, those living the realities of poverty, as well as new partners from business, government, human service, and philanthropic sectors. Such a cross-sector team of the College of Management’s Emerging Leaders are currently participating with us in this model development phase.

There is no better place to carry out the Center’s mission than the McCormack Graduate School and UMass Boston, a very inspiring place to work. I come to work each day inspired by the men and women who study and work --- in all capacities--- on this campus, a true microcosm of our diverse world; on this campus is a treasure trove of dedicated people, committed to advancing learning and to making a difference in the world. I am also inspired by our charismatic leader, Chancellor Keith Motley the Chancellor’s and his vision for this campus. I am very pleased to be on his team!