Mr. President, Mr. Chair and Members of the Board of Trustees, Distinguished Faculty, Honored Guests, Graduates, Friends and Family.

I First and Foremost - Congratulations graduates – we are extremely proud of each and every one of you.

II I am very honored and humbled to receive this recognition today mostly because it helps shed light on an issue most of us would rather not discuss or just ignore.

Mental Illness

IV One morning as I was getting ready to go on the bench I was approached by the ASA and APD who asked me if I would mind talking to a couple who’s son was in jail on a case I was about to hear – It was some serious offense – like possession of a dairy cart (Yes that is a crime in Miami-Dade – so be careful)

Anyway – I met with this distraught couple who told me about their son – a brilliant man – Harvard educated – who had a late onset of schizophrenia and was now recycling through the criminal justice system - regularly arrested on low level offenses.

Being a fairly new judge at the at the time I thought I had a lot more wisdom than I did and a lot more power than I did – and I promised them I would get their son help.

As we got up to go into the courtroom – the mom stopped me and said there is one more thing I need to tell you about my son - He is the former head of psychiatry at JMH –
I was pretty taken back – went into the courtroom and called the case – after an extensive argument with the lawyers – I had no choice but release the Dr. back into the community without any treatment.

Not only did I break my promise to his parents, I also jeopardized his life and the public safety of our community.

None of us become judges to be part of the problem. I left the bench quite upset and learned three very important lessons:

V 3 Lessons:

1) We had a mental health crisis in our community

   Largest % of people w/ MI of any urban area in U.S.
   • 9.1% = 210,000 - 3 X natl Avg. YET ONLY 13% receiving treatment
   • 1200 on Psyco-tropic meds (20%)
   • MD Jail - Largest Mntl Hlth Warehouse in FL
   • $140K per day to manage MH population ($50 Million annually)
   • 3/9 floors
   • Since conditions NOT conducive to treatment - Stay in jail 8 x longer than no illness and Cost 7 x higher than no illness
   • Since 1999 - 20 people w/ mental illness killed during police encounter in Miami-Dade County

Lesson 2) This was not a local problem – but a state and national one. Same problem going on in every courthouse in America. Approximately 400,000 people in jails and prisons in the US with serious
mental illnesses and another 900,000 on some type of community control costing billions of dollars annually.

Lesson 3) Florida’s Community Mental Health System and Crisis Care System (like most states) were developed 40 years ago when most people with serious mental illnesses were in still St. Psychiatric Hospitals. Like most MH Systems - It is an antiquated, fragmented system in great need of reforming.

VI Frankly – our forensic mental health system meets the definition of insanity – We keep doing the same thing over and over again and expect a different outcome.

_There is something terribly wrong with a society that is willing to spend more on imprisoning people with mental illnesses than to treat them._

So I leave you with this challenge -

VII You are all very smart – You have a gift and a talent

And with that gift comes a responsibility.

VIII So today, I challenge you to use your talent, your gifts to help us make this a better community, a better state, a better nation and a better world.

Not only will this be a fulfilling experience, you will be using your gifts to help cure aids or cancer or mental illness or help end homelessness or global warming and you will leave a legacy that leaves us a better nation – a better world.

Thank you.