Columbian Lawyers of Westchester County Awards Ceremony | June 13, 2025
Speech Delivered by Honoree
Angie D'Agostino, Dean for Student and Campus Affairs

Standing before you tonight is both a privilege and a deeply humbling experience. I am honored to accept the Richard J. Daronco Award for Service from the Columbian Lawyers of Westchester County—an association that welcomed me in 2000 and has remained a steadfast supporter of the Pace Law community ever since.

As Judge Angiolillo so graciously noted in his opening remarks, my family's journey—beginning with my immigrant grandparents and mother—laid the foundation for ***the life I am privileged*** to lead today. It wasn't until my daughter Abby interviewed my mother for a school project that I fully understood the depth of that legacy.

Like many Italian-American families, my grandparents were determined that their daughter would assimilate. My mother arrived in this country as a child and didn't recall ever meeting her father until then. He had emigrated years earlier to prepare a life for his family. She arrived at Ellis Island aboard the *Valencia*, looking for him—not by memory, but by photograph. She called him "papa de la carte," or "father of the paper," because she had only ever seen his picture.

My mother was an only child. For me and my three brothers and sister, that meant we were raised with our grandparents at the heart of our home. It wasn't unusual, it was simply how family worked. Though we spent our early years in Newburgh, New York, we moved to South Carolina in 1975, where we grew up.

Education was a non-negotiable value in our household. My parents made it abundantly clear: we would all attend college—and a private one, at that. With five children, we followed the scholarships wherever they led. I arrived in New York at 17 to attend the College of White Plains at Pace University. (formerly Good Counsel College) This is where my connection to the law school began when I met my oldest and dearest friend and colleague, Lou Fasulo, who is here tonight***! A quick thank you for teaching me about New York and literally keeping me alive over the years!***

My mother graduated from Good Counsel College and went on to earn two master's degrees—in French and Italian—from Middlebury College. My father completed his B.S. in Mechanical Engineering and an MBA while working and raising a family. My mother went on to teach at the college level and was always the first to volunteer—whether it was teaching ESL to priests or to newly arrived immigrants. That is where I first began to understand what it meant to live a life of service. My father, *in his own quiet way*, modeled compassion—often bringing home strangers in need of a meal or a hand.

Among my siblings, my sister currently works in the CHIPS space. My three brothers and I all pursued law degrees—three of us were at Pace Law, one at Emory Law—and two of us earned additional graduate degrees. I share this not to boast, but to *honor the transformative power of education* and the values instilled by our parents.

While my brothers practice law across a variety of disciplines, I chose a different path. After being admitted to the Second Department, I remained at the law school. I believe deeply that we, as legal educators, serve as the gatekeepers of this noble profession. I have always approached that responsibility with humility and seriousness.

Over the years, I've attended this dinner many times. The honorees who have come before me—distinguished members of the bench and bar—have served with integrity, championed justice, and advocated for those without a voice. You have inspired me, and tonight, I reflect on what my own service has meant.

I've been blessed to serve at an institution where O*pportunitas*—the opportunity for first-generation students to rise—has mirrored both my personal journey and my cultural heritage. I've known many of you here tonight as students, graduates, and colleagues. For over 30 years, my name has appeared on countless admissions letters—my husband's included**.**

Looking around this room and reading the kind messages from former students over the past few weeks, I feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude. This work has challenged me to meet students where they are, to walk with them through life-changing experiences, and—at times—simply to be a steady presence in an uncertain world.

To my students here tonight, current and recent alumni, thank you for accepting my invitation to attend. Each of you holds a special place in my journey and I am excited to see where life takes you.

To my law school classmates that are here -thank you for walking this journey with me. Our enduring friendship, now 25 years strong, is a testament to the community we have built together.

To my friend and Dean, Horace Anderson—thank you for your generous remarks tonight, and for supporting me in my efforts to prioritize the wellness of our students, staff, and faculty. Your faith in me and that mission allowed me the ability to create a wellness and fitness space, mental health coaching classes, a food pantry, and a professional clothing closet—*resources that reflect who we are and who we must continue to be.*

To my colleagues at Pace and members of the bar: thank you for answering the call—every time I reached out about a student in crisis, you responded with generosity and grace. Your friendship to me and to Pace will never be forgotten.

To my family and friends at Table One thank you for your love and unwavering support both personally and professionally–To my brothers who are in SC and could not be here and my 91-year-old mother, I love you all.

To my husband Rocco, and our children Abby and Joseph: Rocco, you are the steady force in my life. Your unwavering devotion to our family, and the grace with which you carry that responsibility, humbles me every day. You are an extraordinary husband, a phenomenal father, and my life partner in every sense of the word.

To our daughter Abby—a recent graduate of Bucknell University, with a dual major in Psychology and Italian, and now pursuing your Masters in Communicative Sciences and Disorders at NYU—your compassion for others, especially those who are differently abled, and your fierce love of family and heritage are rare and beautiful qualities. You are your brother's greatest champion, and your presence in my life is a daily blessing.

To our son Joseph—our son is nonverbal and differently abled and could not be here tonight - Joseph, thank you for reshaping our lives in the most profound ways. You've taught us the meaning of perseverance, resilience, and faith. With a deep love for his Catholic faith, Joseph aspires to be "a priest who mows the lawn." He reminds us, every single day, that a life filled with meaning does not need to follow a conventional path.

And so, I close with this:

In a world often divided by differences, let us—as members of the legal community—never lose sight of our shared humanity. The law is more than a set of rules—it is a framework through which we must extend dignity, compassion, and understanding. Let us be relentless in our pursuit of justice—and equally tender in our treatment of others.

Let us live with intentionality, guided not by fear but by purpose. May we refuse to let fear be a thief of future endeavors, and instead choose courage, compassion, and conviction every step of the way.

May we lead with compassion. May we honor the strength found in our diversity. And may we recommit ourselves, each day, to upholding the sanctity of every human life *we touch through our work.*

Thank you.
