On behalf of my family, aloha.

I’d like to thank Jon for his invitation to speak tonight and deeply apologize that I’m unable to be there as I have immediate family kuleana that emerged today, which requires me to be at home. I was looking forward to being with you tonight as it is such a great honor for my father and a great honor just to be his son.

These are just collections of some thoughts about my father, through my lens as the son of, in many ways, the world’s best father. The thoughts that I want to convey about my father is in relation to tonight’s celebration and to help people understand two things.

Why did he choose social work as a career and how did social work shape his life long commitment to serve? To answer the first question, it has to go back to when my father was very young and the influence of society that would shape his total journey in life and his lifelong commitment to the betterment of Hawai`i, its people and this special place, and his compassion for children. My Dad grew up in a family with an absence of wealth and yet his parents would bring in orphaned children and children that came out of youth correctional facilities. My Dad was impacted by children who needed help the most and who we typically, as a society, help the least. So my father had hanai brothers and sisters that he didn’t even know their names but what was common is that they were all poor. Being next to these poor children my father deeply felt that indigent and abused children were the worst of all social injustices and was the most important challenge that we need to address. That passion and commitment to do something for his precious home that we call Hawai`i would ultimately lead him to an education in social work trying to find out how to take care of poor children. He needed to help children who needed help the most who society helped the least. This was ingrained in him at a very early age.

The other event that shaped my father’s path to social work was the bombing of Pearl Harbor. My father was committed to fight for the simple principle and value of freedom for his country but also for his home that he called Hawai`i.

Landing in Normandy in the European invasion, fighting as a first scout across 400 miles of French soil one mile from the
German border and shot in the head by a sniper, resulted in two years in a New York hospital many times bandaged blind in an attempt to repair the wound in his left eye. My Dad would speak about in that bandaged blindness he began to understand the power of vision. And in that time he would speak of the two issues that were most important to him when he sifted everything down to core essential values. Those two that remained were: come home to Hawai`i, these deeply special islands and take care of poor kids. My Dad believed that the greatest issue of social injustice was children neglected and abused. These events and deep commitment and growing need to bring care and love to these children took him to the School of Social Work at the University of Hawai`i. It was a calculated and well thought out path that made sense to my Dad’s career journey as well as his deeply seated commitment to do something to make Hawai`i a better place.

In many ways I think, from my lens as a son, lucky for Hawai`i there was a School of Social Work at the University of Hawai`i because it is no ordinary school. Its clientele is different from any place in the world. It was a place where my father could take his dreams and hopes and serve the children he cared about. Lucky the School was there because it provided him the foundation to do that.

I guess the second question that I see as his son and the significance of tonight is to understand the influence of the School of Social Work to my father’s extraordinary career of service.

My father was a social worker and I think it was Salvation Army or it may have been Queen Lili`uokalani Trust. One of his cases was a boy by the name of Sam and I remember that boy because of a number of things but I remember him being my age, young boy, physically very strong; emotionally, spiritually deeply troubled. Sam was strong enough to lift open a manhole cover on the street; one day he put two kids into the manhole and didn’t tell anybody. I don’t know the whole story but the kids were eventually rescued.

My Dad was trying to save Sam.

My guess is that I was about ten years old and I was home in the later afternoon on just an average day. I was sitting at the dining room table and we had a small sliding window between the dining room and the kitchen where my Mom was at.
And this picture I will never forget: my Dad comes home from work, puts his bag down on the ground, walks up to my Mom, they hug each other and my Dad started to cry. That’s the first time I recall him ever crying.

I remember my Dad saying to my Mom “Sam killed himself today. I knew he was going to do it and I couldn’t do anything about it.” I think that issue of being helpless and not being there to save them all, on one hand deeply troubled my father, but being the visionary that he is and having that extraordinarily powerful passion for his values and his beliefs, I think reset his compass to a much broader compass that navigated him toward other paths to ultimately get to the goals of caring for Hawai‘i’s children and on that path was the recognition that the well-being of our children is really reflective of the well-being of our society that ultimately should be there for the needs of children.

So in many ways I think the story of Sam is one of the many stories my father learned from and navigated his life from to make sure Hawai‘i is a caring place for children. When you start to add up all that my father has done and accomplished in areas of health, medicine, education, and the pioneering of early education as a core need for the proper development of children. Add this to his commitment to bettering the condition of his Native people, his saving of Hōkūle‘a as a tool to bring pride and dignity to our culture and our ancestors and giving it to the hearts and minds of Hawai‘i’s children and all children that share the love of this place. And the recognition that respect and care for all living things are essential to the survival of the beauty of Hawai‘i and the earth. Add all of these together and it totals making sure Hawai‘i is a caring place for children.

In my lifetime, I was witness to the power of my father’s leadership because so many people believed in his vision and deeply respected his commitment and passion and always, always felt that they were safe next to him because he was always kind and he was always compassionate. And I would need to mention in this moment in time that my father did not accomplish all of this by himself. That his sources of strength came from many places but he was lucky, very, very lucky to have married and spent a lifetime with his wife, my mother Laura. Because as he navigated, she truly was his guiding star.
The reason why to me, as his son, the naming of the school for my father is so relevant and so pono is because my Dad’s legacy, career, life, work, passion, vision is like a sail plan for success at meeting social justice issues through the domain of social work and all of his work, I believe, was successful because he went to school. I don’t believe that he would have been successful at his career as well as his dreams if he did not get his masters degree at the School of Social Work in Hawai`i because it was there that he built the foundation for the real issues that needed to be dealt with for the people who needed the support the most and that society supported the least. It was there that he learned discipline and, I think, in many ways it was there that his innate sense for compassion was reinforced. This School of Social Work at the University of Hawai`i is truly a place of strength and foundation for the legacy and life of my father.

On behalf of my whole family – a heartfelt mahalo to all of you.

Aloha pau `ole.