



## UMB News

### Raring to Go, Social Work 'Superheroes' Celebrate

May 27, 2022 | By [Mary Therese Phelan](#)

Standing behind the podium on stage in front of 300 fellow graduates of the [University of Maryland School of Social Work \(UMSSW\)](#), student speaker **Elijah McCabe, MSW '22**, began his remarks with an unusual request, asking his fellow graduates to consider the movie "The Avengers."



"I'll give a brief synopsis, spoiler alert. Villain comes to New York City, heroes team up, heroes beat villain. At the end of the movie, when the villain is defeated, the heroes celebrate their victory and move on," McCabe told his classmates gathered for UMSSW's convocation ceremony May 20 at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County's Chesapeake Employers Insurance Arena. The event recognized graduates from December 2021, May 2022, and July 2022.

"Now, as you look around the landscape, you see a completely desolated New York City. Buildings are flattened, cars are flipped over, the city is in rough shape. But the villain is gone, the city is saved, right?" McCabe continued. "As a social work student watching this movie, I'm starting to get stressed out. Families displaced from homes, a reduction in the availability of social services, health care bills, insurance claims, the list goes on. But while this is a movie set in a fictitious universe, this story is all too real."

As social workers on a quest to solve the big problems, McCabe said, "We ignore the damage we leave behind. Whether that's harm to communities of color, the LGBTQ+ population, people experiencing homelessness, or even a client we're working one-on-one with," McCabe said. "It could be a program we developed that unintentionally harmed a community, or a policy we supported that has ramifications we didn't foresee. All this to say: We are not intentionally causing this damage, but it's damage nonetheless."

His remarks were built around the Social Work Month theme for 2022: "The Time is Right for Social Work."

"To add to the theme for 2022, I believe the time is right for *accountable* social work. Accountable to our clients, our co-workers, but most importantly ourselves," McCabe said. "Being accountable for something we didn't realize we were doing in the first place is not easy,

*The family of Jazmin Morant joins in celebrating her newly earned Master of Social Work degree.*

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but it's important work."

McCabe noted that at the end of "The Avengers," when the villain is defeated, the heroes all go out for lunch and celebrate their victory.

"So, I'm hopeful that today. We celebrate our victory, but tomorrow, we strive to be more accountable social work superheroes," he said as his classmates cheered.

It was the first in-person convocation ceremony for UMSSW Dean **Judy L. Postmus, PhD, ACSW**, who arrived at the [University of Maryland, Baltimore](https://www.umaryland.edu/) in July 2020.

"Graduates, I am so proud of you today as you join our great social work profession," Postmus said. "You are the class that started and finished in the midst of dual pandemics — COVID and racial injustice. You showed resilience, perseverance, and just a general 'stick-to-it-iveness' as you started this program and finish today. All of these qualities — negotiation, flexibility, shifting at a moment's notice — are skills you will need as you enter this great profession."

She shared five pieces of advice to the new social workers.

1. **Be open to new opportunities and adventures along the way.** Within three months of receiving her MSW degree, Postmus began implementing new programs and supervising other social workers. "I never dreamed I would be a dean some day when I graduated with my MSW in 1990, especially as a first-generation daughter of immigrant parents."
2. **Never stop learning.** "Society is constantly changing, and so should you. It feels like we've been trying to walk on shifting sands these last few years. Learn from your mistakes. Learn from each other. Look for opportunities to expand who you are and the work you do."
3. **Practice self-care.**
4. **Pay attention to aligning your values with your mission and your work.** "Remember why you became a social worker in the first place. Don't hide from your mistakes. Make sure you find great supervisors and mentors along the way to keep you focused."
5. **Find your tribe.** "Find your network of other social workers that you can laugh and cry with. These are the people who understand the work you do, why you do it, and support you along the way."

In her keynote, Shantay Jackson, director of the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (MONSE), said she was honored and excited to accept UMSSW's offer to speak to address the graduates, but also a bit nervous.

"I, by practice, am not a social worker, and I didn't immediately know what message I could deliver to this class, not having the same background as you all," Jackson said. As MONSE director, she is responsible for addressing violence as a public health issue; serving as the accountability partner for all city agencies and local, state, and federal partners; delivering public safety policy recommendations; and conducting meaningful engagement with Baltimore's neighborhoods in the work of co-producing public safety.

"But in thinking about the message that I could deliver, it's that this city, this world, needs good people like you in it," she said. "People who are going to make this world a better place, folks who understand that this work is bigger than themselves, and that it takes a cohesive village or in the words of the dean, tribe members to truly enact impactful and sustainable change in our communities. Welcome to the village, ya'll."

As families posed for pictures outside on the arena plaza, Glenda Morant could not stop beaming at her granddaughter, **Jazmin Morant, MSW '22**, who will soon begin putting her MSW to work in the Baltimore County Department of Social Services.

"She's worked very hard, going nonstop all the time," Glenda Morant said. "She is a great blessing, and I am very, very proud."

"It really made me step up," her granddaughter added, reflecting on the work it took to earn her degree. "I'm proud of myself, too. It's been a great experience.' "

*To view the entire ceremony, watch the video above.*

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