Statement from Dr. Elsie L. Scott, Director
Ronald W. Walters Leadership and Public Policy Center, Howard University
on the passing of
District of Columbia City Councilman and former Mayor Marion Barry

We are saddened by the passing of District of Columbia City Councilman and former Mayor Marion Barry. Mayor Barry’s life can best be described as a life of service.

From humble roots in the Mississippi Delta, he joined the civil rights movement and started promoting change in society. He eventually moved to his adopted home of Washington, DC where he became part of the first generation of elected officials. Few people devote their whole life to public service, but he did. Starting with a position on the first elected school board, moving on to serving 16 years as mayor and finally to service as a city councilman.

Mayor Barry will long be remembered for bringing a voice to the voiceless of Washington, DC. He opened doors to the poor, young people, senior citizens and African Americans who felt that the government did not work for them. His signature program, the summer youth employment program, offered an opportunity for thousands of D.C. youth to gain job skills at an early age. The opening of government employment to African Americans promoted the growth of a robust African American middle class in the city. In addition, he designed the contracting process to provide opportunities for minority and small business contractors.

The mark left by Mayor Barry can be seen throughout the city, in the buildings and infrastructure of the city. His decentralization of government offices and services brought government into neighborhoods more accessible to the people. His idea to place the Reeves Center at 14th and U Streets led to the development of the U Street corridor as a vibrant center of dining, entertainment and nightlife. His joining forces with Abe Polin brought professional basketball and other sports activities into downtown.

We thank Marion Barry for his 49+ years of service to the District of Columbia. We offer our condolences to Cora Masters Barry, Christopher Barry, other family members and his extended family of Washington, DC residents.