

Good evening and thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Livja Koka. I am an MD/MBA student in my third year of medical school.

First, a little bit about me. I was born in Albania, I came here when I was 9 years old. My parents worked two or three jobs each to be able to afford living the American Dream as immigrants. They worked as cleaners, nurse's aide, bus driver, welder, and seamstress to give us a foundation. All a sacrifice so that I could build a bright future here. My mother, who has worked the night shift as a nurse's aide at Hartford Hospital since the year 2000, encouraged me to get a volunteering job at the hospital when I was a teenager and ever since then, I fell in love with the idea of becoming a doctor. When I was in high school, I had straight As. I was accepted to several good universities and ultimately had to choose between Brown and UConn. UConn was an affordable place with infinite opportunity but a place with over 30,000 other students, knowing that if I went here, I had to have the grit and wit to compete with thousands and prove myself. My other top option was Brown, a place that offered an almost guaranteed job upon graduation due to title, but a place that was out of my price range, offered little financial help, and away from the support of my family. So, I chose UConn, and it was one of the best decisions I ever made. While at UConn as an undergrad, I was the president of the premedical society, served in the student body, and as many clubs as I could get my hands on. I learned and I grew I developed as a person because I was surrounded by a community with grit, many others that were immigrants much like me who were there willing to put in the hard work and compete, absorb, and benefit from the infinite programs, sports, activities, and clubs the school offered. Because I worked through university and because of the scholarships I received I was able to graduate from undergrad debt free.

During undergrad and when I started Medical School, I became heavily involved with UConn's Health Career Opportunities Program, which recruits underrepresented medical and dental students, supports them, and provides opportunities for them. Through that program, I was given a full scholarship during medical school. And thank god for that because after having finished two years of medical school and my MBA I found out I was pregnant. Nobody really talks about just how expensive a baby can be but let me tell you baby formula and diapers are not cheap. If it were not for that scholarship, my life and my baby's life would have fallen apart.

Now as I go from rotation to rotation, I see just how much our school does for patients, especially in Hartford, an area with so many patients living in poverty and in need with multiple co-morbidities. When our school chooses students to accept into the program, we are not only geared to accept the bright but most importantly we choose students with kind hearts and the desire to give back something to the community. And as a physician in training, giving back to our patients, sitting down with them, taking that little extra time to call the pharmacy for them, or listen to the story about their granddaughter, or looking up the side effects of a medication for them for the 5th time, THAT is the greatest and most important skill we can learn as doctors and to be able to do that we need support and resources.

We as medical students oftentimes, just like our patients, are tired, stressed out, and overwhelmed. Every single little penny that is put into our medical education is put into people whose whole life dedication is learning to become wiser and more skilled in that moment where we sit down and make decisions with our patients to elevate their well-being, from one human being to another human being. Our sole purpose there is to give, so when you give to us, it

trickles down directly through our minds, hungry to learn, down to our patients that are truly in need. And not only that, and I speak on behalf of myself, but I know that I owe so much of my livelihood to UConn and I know that without the scholarships and charitable donations I have received here, I would be nowhere. Neither I nor my immigrant parents had the resources. And that is something I will never forget and will always be grateful for. When I am working as a physician someday, if there is anywhere that I owe gratitude to, if there is anywhere where I will donate my money to, it will first be towards the same funds that helped me reach where I am today. I kindly ask you to please maintain your support for the next generation of students at UCONN, so that we can move forward with our passion to learn and to grow and to give back to our community, so that we can become professionals and so that someday we can give back to you, the people that got us here.