



Oct. 17, 2019

To the UMB Community:

I know the entire UMB community is devastated by the news this morning that we lost one of the University's greatest allies, staunchest advocates, and dearest friends. Rep. Elijah Cummings was a hero to many, and I know legions will eulogize his extraordinary leadership in Congress; his long fight for racial, social, and economic justice; his life in service of the American people; and his unyielding work to improve our nation and our democracy.

But I knew Rep. Cummings as a man profoundly dedicated to the youth of Baltimore. He worked every single day to ensure equity and opportunity for the city's children. Despite weighty responsibilities in the U.S. House of Representatives, he was a constant presence in his district and at UMB, pushing for programs that would develop the talents of young people and show them a future beyond their city block. And children knew that -- they were drawn to him; they were drawn to his personal story of challenge and triumph.

I remember at one of our first white coat ceremonies for our UMB CURE Scholars, Rep. Cummings shared with the children his own story, how he fought to integrate a public swimming pool in South Baltimore, when he was just about their age. He recounted his early awakening to social justice, his belief that everyone should have the same chances in life, the same opportunities, as everyone else. He told the scholars he understood their pain. Then, in a speech that grew into a fiery crescendo, he told them to take that pain, to turn it into their passion, and to find their purpose. No one moved while he talked; the children barely blinked. The adults in the audience blinked back tears.

I saw Rep. Cummings' connection with young people every time he came to campus. He was the guiding force behind our Summer Bioscience Internship Program, asking and cajoling faculty to take city high school students into their labs over the summer, to immerse them in scientific discovery and innovation, so that they could make a meaningful difference -- in their own lives and in the lives of others. In fact, the last time Rep. Cummings was on campus this past July, he was here to meet with the interning students. Despite his failing health, he talked with them for a long time. He listened to their hopes and plans. He gave them thoughtful advice.

We have lost one of the nation's greatest leaders certainly, but we have lost, as well, a hero to generations of children -- in West Baltimore and beyond -- whose lives are better because of Elijah Cummings. I mourn his passing with deep sadness, and I send my prayers not only to his family, friends, and colleagues but to everyone touched by this extraordinary man.

Sincerely,

**Jay A. Perman, MD**  
*President*

This note was authorized for distribution to the University of Maryland, Baltimore community by the Office of the President.