



# Office of the President

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## Selected Speeches

### UMB CURE Scholars, Year 2 Launch

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Oct. 1, 2016

School of Nursing Auditorium

Good morning, everyone. I am so happy to welcome you to this celebration of our UMB CURE Scholars! This is an incredible day for me, because I finally get to meet the scholars I've heard so much about—the scholars who are excited about school and science and everything they're going to do in the future.

And I don't think we should have to wait one minute longer to say "hi." So would our NEW CURE Scholars please stand and wave?

Now ... would our RETURNING CURE Scholars stand and wave?

You're our stars today. And we're here because of you.

I'm joined this morning by some amazing people. U.S. Rep. Elijah Cummings, whose work and passion inspired this program, and a man who inspires our scholars—and me!—every single day. Dr. Sanya Springfield, director of the NCI Center to Reduce Cancer Health Disparities. Dr. Springfield is—in many ways—the reason we're here today. Dr. Robin Saunders, executive director of the UMB CURE Scholars Program. This work—and these scholars—they are truly a labor of love for her. Thank you.

In a few minutes, I'm going to ask these special guests to join me here on stage. But not yet. Because first we're going to watch a video about the UMB CURE Scholars Program. It's silly for me to tell you about the program, when its real stars—our scholars, mentors, and teachers—can tell you themselves. So let's watch.

I'm going to tell you something about that video. It was produced by an Oscar-winning documentary filmmaker. I'm not kidding—she's really an Academy Award winner! Susan Hadary and her team at MedSchool Maryland put it together. They're here with us today, and they deserve a round of applause.

In this room are so many people who see the enormous potential of the children here today—and children just like them in neighborhoods across our city—and they want to help; they want to make sure that every child who wants to succeed is given the *chance* to succeed.

I see leaders in education, in philanthropy, community advocacy, business, and medicine. We're all united in the belief that hope and hard work will get us very far, indeed.

Our sponsor for today's celebration is Kaiser Permanente, and with us is Maritha Gay, senior director of external affairs. To my partner in this great endeavor, Dr. Kevin Cullen, director of the Marlene and Stewart Greenebaum Comprehensive Cancer Center, thank you for your unassailable conviction that together we can make a difference. To the leadership of this University—including Bill Wood, chair of the UMB Foundation Board of Trustees—thank you for advancing our vision of equity and opportunity.

To everyone here from our CURE schools—Franklin Square Elementary/Middle School, Green Street Academy, Southwest Baltimore Charter School—thank you for nurturing such bright, curious children, and for letting us partner with you in their development.

To the UMB CURE Scholars Advisory Board, we simply couldn't do this without your leadership and good counsel. To the Leadership Team—the “Dream Team”—I thank you for the hours and hours (and hours) of hard work that a program like this demands. Your dedication and stamina are an inspiration.

Before I turn my attention to our scholars—and I promise I will—I want to acknowledge one more special group. Would all of our NEW mentors please stand, and stay standing for a minute?

All told, we have 90+ new mentors this year. Incredible.

Now would all of our RETURNING mentors with us please stand?

You should all get to know one another, because I say this to our new mentors: At some point, you're going to need some advice, and the only people I'd trust to give me advice are the mentors who've already seen it all—and stuck it out.

And if the work ever seems tough, if the hill ever seems steep, let me tell you something pretty extraordinary: Of the 89 mentors who joined the program last fall, 76 came back for year 2. If you don't want to do the math yourselves, that's an 85 percent retention rate.

Now, everyone here might not know how busy our mentors are—how busy our students, faculty, staff, and friends are—but I do. These are not people with a lot of time to give. So that tells me two things: These are some deeply, deeply committed people; and there's something so enticing about this program that these mentors ignore their best interests and keep signing up. I think that's a good combination.

When I talk about the CURE Scholars Program—its premise and its promise—I think it's helpful to relay a truth I find particularly compelling: **Talent is universal. Opportunity is not.**

All you have to do is look at these CURE Scholars sitting here today to know that talent is not our problem. We are NOT in want of young talent to develop.

All you have to do is listen to our returning scholars—as you did in the video—to see how proud and poised and confident they are. And they have every right to be. Because their grades are going up. Their school attendance has improved. Now they want to be surgeons, scientists, inventors—even pediatricians like me. They want to go to college. And they want to make people healthier, happier, and stronger.

So we've got the talent. That's already done. We can check that off.

Now we have to make the *opportunity*. We have to dismantle the barriers to access that separate our young people from their potential and from their purpose.

A couple of days ago, a man named Dr. Marc Nivet came to the UMB campus. He talked to us about preparing the next generation of students, especially students of color. And he said there are staircases, and then there are escalators. He said if you fall down a staircase, you're probably going to stay at the bottom.

But if you fall down an escalator, it doesn't matter so much. Because an escalator won't let you stay down; you just keep rising regardless.

That's what we're building here today. We're building an escalator. We're going to make sure our young people can be whatever they want to be, and do whatever they want to do—even cure cancer. We're going to make sure they just .. keep .. rising.

I promise we're going to stick with you—we're going to cheer for you and support you—and we're never going to leave you behind. And just like I said to the mentors, if it ever feels difficult, if you ever think it's too much work, I want you to do something for me. I want you to go to one of our 7th grade scholars. They're sitting behind you right now. And I want you to ask them for a pep talk. Believe me, these 7th graders can talk—and after that conversation, you'll believe you can do anything in the world.

And you *can* do anything in the world. I've got proof. I'd like to introduce you to a few people. Dr. Laundette Jones is assistant professor of epidemiology and public health in our School of Medicine. Dr. Jones, would you please stand and wave? Dr. Greg Carey is assistant professor of microbiology and immunology in our School of Medicine. Dr. Carey, would you stand? Dr. Tonya Webb is associate professor of microbiology and immunology in our School of Medicine. Dr. Webb, could you stand and wave?

All three of these scientists are alumni of the NCI CURE Scholars Program. All three are on faculty at UMB. And guess what they're doing right now? They're working to cure cancer!

This isn't a pipe dream. This isn't just a feel-good program. This is a program that develops the next generation of scientists who can absolutely change the landscape of health care research and delivery.

Do you wonder why we care so much? Why we hope you might pursue a career in the health sciences? It's not only because we want you to realize your full potential and land a good-paying job that you love (though we do).

We care so much because we need you. Science needs you. Your neighbors need you. Baltimore needs you. And I'll tell you why: Cancer and other chronic diseases devastate communities like the ones you live in. Cancer diagnoses and deaths are higher in the city than they are in the counties. And they're higher still among the city's black population.

On so many health indicators, African Americans fare worse than everyone else. It's not right. It's not fair. And it's not inevitable.

We're counting on you, our young scholars to rewrite what's possible in terms of treating and curing disease; and to be that shining light for the next generation who will follow in your path.

I want to end my remarks by honoring the unsung heroes of the UMB CURE Scholars Program. And that's the parents and families of these bright and beautiful students.

Last year at this time, we inducted 41 scholars into the program. Returning for year 2 are 38 scholars. Again, if you don't want to do the math, that's a 93 percent retention rate. And that's the most extraordinary thing I can imagine. Because that means 93 percent of our CURE parents and grandparents put this program above everything else; 93 percent decided that all the sacrifices were worth it; 93 percent made sure their scholars could take advantage of everything this program has to offer—no matter what obstacles popped along the way. And I know there were many.

So to all the parents, grandparents, and families here today, *you* are the heroes of this program. Thank you for giving your children a safe, supportive space to develop their talents, their creativity, and their drive. If these scholars are extraordinary—and they are—it's because you let them shine. It's because they were confident of your love and encouragement every day.

Could ALL the parents of a CURE Scholar please stand?

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