My name is Garrett Fontaine and I am a resident of Simsbury, CT and a second year medical student at the University Of Connecticut School Of Medicine. Thank you for your past support of our school and bestowing upon me the opportunity to speak about my experience.

As Connecticut’s only public medical school, UConn provides exceptional and forward-thinking education to our State’s future healthcare providers at a reasonable price. The benefits that UConn Health provides are immeasurable – not only to Connecticut residents like myself who aim to be our community’s future doctors and dentists, but also to the State, its health and its economy.

As a graduate of UConn Storrs in 2016, returning to UConn for medical school was an exciting opportunity. However, my decision to attend was not without hesitation. Having relied on lecture-style learning for our entire learning career, many of us were apprehensive about the new medical school curriculum that UConn had just developed, called MDelta. Additionally, we learned that we were to have extra coursework to earn a certificate in the Social Determinants of Health. Many of us questioned if this new style of learning would adequately prepare us for clinical rotations and if we really needed this extra certificate coursework in addition to an already arduous workload.

Having finished my second year in the curriculum, I can say with certainty that MDelta sets students on a different level from students at other schools. From month 1 in the curriculum, we are trained with patient actors and work weekly with a community physician preceptor to build our clinical skills. Many of my friends at other medical school are beginning their third year and have yet to personally interact with a patient. The quality of our training further shows in the regular unsolicited feedback I have received from attending physicians; some have even remarked that we are more advanced as second years than many third years they have seen in the past.

While clinical prowess is important, to be a truly exceptional physician requires more than simply being able to properly diagnose your patient and prescribe them medical therapy. Research has shown that in many cases a person’s zip code (or other social factors) may better predict their health outcome than their genetic code or anything we prescribe them. This issue is the focus of our certificate program in the Social Determinants of Health. Through our coursework we are taught how housing, socioeconomic status, education, and many other factors can impact patient health. One of my experiences, in particular, emphasizes the importance of this extra coursework. Early in our second year, our school arranged for us to see a hospitalized pediatric patient. Another student and I were assigned a child being treated for breathing
problems. Though the standard medical treatment algorithm was followed, this child seemed to end up in the hospital on a monthly basis. We further noted that the patient did not have a regular primary care physician and had little social history entered in his chart. Though a thorough interview we uncovered that the child lives with multiple smokers and is allergic to his mom’s new dog, both likely worsening his asthma. Further, neither parent had fully understood the complex treatment plan and had abandoned it months previously in favor of traditional medicines. Thanks to our training, we were able to identify the social and environmental factors worsening the child’s asthma, discuss a culturally competent care plan that respects their family traditions, and connect them to services that would help them reduce environmental triggers for their child’s asthma.

UConn Health and its School of Medicine is on the cutting-edge of medical education, thanks in large part to your support. Your continued support of the School of Medicine is a crucial investment in a new crop of physicians who will advance the quality of healthcare in the state because they see beyond the history of present illness and treat the patient in the larger context of their medical and social history. Thank you for your past support and for allowing me to speak today.