

Witness Statement

I am Aaron Oluyeju, a pre-med biology graduate of the University of Maine at Machias, class of '24. I am a Roux Institute Pre-Clinical Gap Year MA for the 2024-2025. I am writing this to testify to the importance of the gap year experience in my preparation for medical school.

As an international student hoping to attend medical school, I have not been eligible for most of the opportunities offered to pre-med students throughout my undergrad due to visa restrictions. It is common knowledge that clinical experience is essential to medical school applications, and without the Gap Year program, my options would have been limited.

Working at a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), Greater Portland Health, has been a blessing. I have gained experience managing clinical responsibilities such as scheduling diagnostic procedures, medication and diagnostic prior authorizations, and managing latent TB infection treatment. I am privileged to have encountered various patients, illnesses, and medicines before even going to medical school.

Working at a clinic that offers low-barrier, patient-centered healthcare has given me the privilege to encounter people of all different spheres of life—immigrants, unhoused individuals, and people recovering from addiction. As an aspiring neurosurgeon, witnessing the tremendous impact of increased access to healthcare and medication-assisted treatment (MAT) on patients recovering from addiction has been encouraging, especially as someone interested in neurological disorders.

As someone still paying off my tuition, the rent stipend has been a solid relief, knowing that even with the sky-high rent prices in Portland, my rent is paid for the month. Many recent graduates would relate, especially those who took out student loans to pay for their undergraduate degrees.

The Pre-Clinical Gap-Year program is an essential step in preparing future physicians to provide patient-oriented, low-barrier healthcare at all levels of healthcare. The program is necessary for students from universities in rural Maine, who otherwise might not have access to the resources as opposed to our urban counterparts.

I urge policymakers to continue this program to ensure all physician aspirants can access the experiences they need to become competent and compassionate physicians.

~Aaron Oluyeju