

In elementary school, being a member of a union family meant skipping school to attend protests with my father's local, fighting for a cause I did not truly understand yet. It meant taking naps on the comfortable couch in the union office and begging my dad for a dollar to buy something from the snack cabinet. It meant family trips to the Grand Canyon after spending a weekend in Las Vegas doing homework in a hotel room while my father was downstairs at a union meeting. It meant giggling when my father called fellow union members brother and sister, wondering why he would refer to people he was not related to this way. In high school, being a member of a union family meant a feeling of pride arose whenever unions were mentioned in class. Learning about all the good that unions did and continue to do made me happy knowing I was related to someone who was continuing the legacy of enacting real change and defending workers of all backgrounds. Now that I am graduating high school, I finally understand why my dad calls fellow union members brother and sister. I saw firsthand the amount of work he did for his fellow workers. I saw the late night and weekend phone calls, the red-eye flights to Washington D.C., the hard-fought wins and frustrating losses, and the effort my father and others put into helping those who needed it. Being a member of a union means having a group of people who may not know you well personally, but who will fight for you as if you were family. Being a member of a union means knowing that your union family has your back no matter what.

I have wanted to become a physician since I was nine years old. Pursuing a career in STEM as a woman will have drawbacks, including the gender wage gap. I am grateful for the integral role that unions have played in fighting to close that wage gap, but there is much more work that needs to be done. Female physicians are paid around 25% less than their male counterparts, with the gap being even higher for women specialists and for women of color. Despite the fact that unions could help lower this wage gap in doctors, only around only 6% of physicians are unionized due to misconceptions that joining a union is selfish and prioritizes personal needs over the needs of patients. As an aspiring physician, I disagree with this elitist notion wholeheartedly. In recent decades, healthcare has lost its most essential component: the patient-doctor relationship. Humanity is the essence of medicine and the essence of unions. Increasing physician membership in unions would help shift the focus in the medical community from the business and profitability of hospitals and their investors to the health and well-being of patients and their communities. The Covid-19 pandemic exposed not only the inequities in healthcare in the United States, but also the need for legislation that ensures paid family leave

and more affordable child care for professional women. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the reforms that must be implemented in the healthcare system and the labor that must be continued by unions to address these societal issues and to promote fairness and equity for people of all backgrounds, especially working moms. I hope one day to serve society and help enact needed changes by becoming not only a skilled and compassionate physician, but also an engaged and proactive union leader, just like my father.

I could not be more proud about being a member of a union family. I would be honored to be selected to receive the Dominick D. Critelli, Jr. Scholarship, because IFPTE represents the ideal that I have come to understand: joining a union means joining a family.