

Press Release

Akerman and the National CASA/GAL Association for Children Announce 2023 Recipient of Academic Excellence Scholarship for Youth in Foster Care

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Top 100 U.S. law firm Akerman LLP and the National Court Appointed Special Advocate/Guardian ad Litem (CASA/GAL) Association for Children are proud to announce the recipient of the 2023 Akerman Academic Excellence Scholarship.

Related People

Beth Zafonte

Rozalija (Rozi) Jurovich, a junior at Boise State University, will receive \$2,500 a year in scholarship support, for up to four years. Rozi, who is a Fallston, MD native, is majoring in English with plans to attend law school – an inspiration she credits to her CASA volunteer mentor. At some point in the future, Rozi also wants to serve as a CASA volunteer herself.

The Akerman scholarship program is in its eighth year, and the law firm works closely with CASA/GAL to find deserving applicants who have spent time in foster care, interview them, and provide support to increase their chances of success in college and their eventual careers. This year's scholar is an exceptional college student with lived experience in foster care who is now thriving at the college level and has big ambitions for the future.

Esta Cain, who is Rozi's court appointed special advocate, is a volunteer with CASA of Harford

County, Maryland. She has provided extraordinary support, mentorship and motivation to Rozi over many years. Rozi describes Esta as being kind, smart, and everything Rozi wants to be – adding, “She is amazing.”

In her scholarship application, Rozi noted that she has “maintained consistent effort in all of my classes and am driven to succeed.” This is clearly shown by the 4.0 GPA she maintains. Rozi noted that, “This award will help me to inspire other kids in care as well, because I can show them just how much a child in foster care is capable of.”

With Rozi’s bright outlook and outstanding academic achievements, her future success looks assured, as does the impact her accomplishments will have on children and youth in foster care, and all of us.

The Akerman Scholarship, which awards \$2,500 a year for up to four years of higher education, is funded by the law firm through an endowment established in 2015 as part of the firm’s historic \$1 million pledge to CASA/GAL. The endowment supports young adults who have spent part of their childhood in the foster care system, by helping minimize the financial burden of higher education. Scholarship recipients go through an intense application process that includes an essay and video interviews. Each student demonstrates outstanding academic commitment and readiness for success. The scholarship endowment is currently supporting five scholars, contributing a total of \$12,500 annually to their educational pursuits.

Across the country, slightly more than 50 percent of youth in foster care earn a high school diploma, compared to 91 percent of all students nationwide. Only 15 percent of youth in foster care attend postsecondary institutions, with only about three percent completing college. Youth in foster care who do attend college often leave before graduation due to insufficient support, lack of appropriate guidance, and unmet financial needs. There are a number of

studies that demonstrate the invaluable benefits a CASA/GAL volunteer brings to a child's life. One study showed that children with a CASA/GAL advocate are likely to do better in school. The goal of the Akerman Scholarship is to help these students afford higher learning so they will be more successful after they age out of foster care and are able to live independently.

“Rozi is a bright young adult who has demonstrated remarkable resilience and tenacity, and has set lofty goals for herself that I know she will achieve. Like you, I look forward to seeing how she continues to grow and thrive in her studies and career. I am grateful that Akerman, in partnership with National CASA/GAL, is able to play a positive role in her journey,” said Beth Zafonte, chair of Akerman's Philanthropic Council and Director of Economic Services for the firm's Real Estate Practice Group in New York.

“Supporting youth who have experienced foster care as they continue on their path to success is an important initiative of the National CASA/GAL Association. The scholarships provided through this partnership with Akerman are one of the many ways that we are able to help young people achieve their full potential,” said National CASA/GAL Association CEO Tara Lisa Perry. “I have no doubt that Rozi will be a successful attorney and serve children and youth as a CASA volunteer when the time is right. Her enthusiasm and ambition to make the world a better place is truly inspiring.”

About Akerman LLP

Akerman LLP is a top 100 U.S. law firm recognized among the most forward-thinking firms in the industry by *Financial Times*. Its more than 700 lawyers and business professionals collaborate with the world's most successful enterprises and entrepreneurs to navigate change, seize opportunities, and help drive innovation and growth.

About the National CASA/GAL Association for Children

The National Court Appointed Special Advocate/Guardian ad Litem (CASA/GAL) Association for Children, together with its 939 state and local member programs, supports and promotes court-appointed volunteer advocacy so that every child who has experienced abuse or neglect in the United States can be safe, have a permanent home and the opportunity to thrive. National CASA/GAL offers leadership and support to the network of programs and leads its continued growth. To learn more, visit nationalcasagal.org.