

Press Release

Akerman and National CASA/GAL Association for Children Announce 2024 Recipient of Academic Excellence Scholarship for Foster Youth

November 4, 2024

Akerman, in partnership with the National Court Appointed Special Advocate/Guardian ad Litem Association for Children (National CASA/GAL), proudly announces Sanaii Williams as the recipient of the prestigious 2024 Akerman Academic Excellence Scholarship. A dedicated third-year pre-law student at Emory University, Sanaii hails from North Chicago, IL.

The Akerman Scholarship was established through an endowment created in 2015 as part of the firm's landmark \$1 million commitment to the National CASA/GAL Association. This endowment aims to alleviate the financial burdens faced by young adults who have spent part of their childhood in the foster care system. Recipients of this scholarship exemplify exceptional academic dedication and readiness for future success. Currently, the endowment supports four scholars, contributing a total of \$10,000 each year towards their educational journeys.

Sanaii's path has been marked by resilience. After navigating 18 residential placements and attending 20 different schools, she graduated from North Chicago Community High School in May 2022. Now in her third year at Emory University, she recently

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Scott A. Meyers

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transitioned her major from nursing to pre-law. This pivotal change has fueled her ambition to pursue a legal career dedicated to advocating for at-risk youth. Last summer, she interned with CASA of Lake County in Illinois, where she gained invaluable insights into courtroom proceedings related to abuse and neglect cases. This experience deepened her resolve to leverage her personal history to uplift others facing similar challenges. In addition to her academic pursuits and work with CASA of Lake County, Sanaii is actively involved in Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Graduation Generation, National Council of Negro Women, and Boxes of Blessings.

“Sanaii’s journey towards higher education is a testament to her incredible character, strength and determination,” said Scott Meyers, Chairman and CEO of Akerman and President of the Akerman Foundation. “She has faced significant adversity with remarkable courage while remaining steadfast in her academic pursuits. Her commitment to using her experiences to improve the lives of other youth is truly inspiring. We eagerly anticipate the impact she will make in her legal career.”

Sally Wilson Erny, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of National CASA/GAL, remarked on Sanaii’s character: “Engaging with Sanaii reveals her profound sense of self and unwavering passion for realizing her dreams. Her resilience shines through in how she has adapted to life’s challenges. Sanaii possesses a unique ability not only to navigate obstacles but also to forge her own path by harnessing her strengths. Her journey promises to be extraordinary, and with her talents and determination, we are confident that she will achieve remarkable success.”

Research underscores the vital role CASA/GAL volunteers play in a child’s life. Children supported by CASA/GAL advocates are more likely to excel academically. While only 50 percent of the youths in foster care graduate high school compared to 91 percent of youth nationwide, just 15 percent pursue postsecondary education—with a mere 3 percent

completing college, due to a lack of support and financial resources. The Akerman Scholarship aims to bridge these gaps, empowering students like Sanaii to thrive as they transition out of foster care into independent living.

About Akerman

Founded in 1920, Akerman is recognized as one of the country's premier law firms, with more than 700 lawyers in 25 offices throughout the United States.

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 941 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.