



# Meet Our 2022-2023 Scholars

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# SALIHAH AAKIL BEY (she/her)

## Howard University

*I aspire for my art to be the kind of safe space that [HIV/AIDS] activists made. A place that teaches words to discuss our lives, love to remind us we matter, and beauty to remind us to smile.... I want to tell the stories of my people, Black, Muslim, American people, and in doing so make us known...show all that we've overcome, the music we've made, the love we've brought, and show that our story is America.*



Salihah (Sasa) is a multimedia artist, writer, poet, potter and bassist in her junior year studying art and education at Howard University in Washington, D.C. In 2021, she became the Montgomery County, Maryland, Youth Poet Laureate; she dedicates all her creative focus to amplifying themes of social justice, advocacy and positive change, with the goal of being accessible to all. As an artist and activist, Salihah hand-printed 700 postcards protesting George Floyd's murder, distributing them nationally so others could mail them to local politicians and police departments. Having experienced Islamophobia and bigotry in her life, Salihah wants her art to reflect the lives, faces and stories of people like her, and especially Black Muslim girls, so that they see loving depictions and images of themselves positively portrayed in the media.

# LESLY CHÁVEZ-VALENCIA (she/her)

## University of Texas at Austin

*In the end, my hope is to give back to the body of social science research and assist in the effort to increase the amount of research on undocumented and migrant communities. I tell my undocumented story in hopes of helping my brothers and sisters, and with the hope that others will do the same, and the undocumented will be documented in history books.*



Lesly is a senior at UT at Austin with a triple major in Sociology, Mexican American & Latina/o Studies and RIM (Race, Indigeneity and Migration). Lesly completed her honors thesis on policing of undocumented communities in Texas, Arizona and California. At Notre Dame University's Summer Research Opportunity Program, she researched multigenerational punishment concerning mixed-status families that tracks how laws effecting undocumented individuals impact their children who are commonly U.S. citizens, thereby perpetuating social inequality. The first in her family to attend college, she was honored with a President's Student Advisory Committee seat in the University of Texas Senate, empowering her to consult with the UT's President on pressing student needs and concerns, and to speak on behalf of student body communities. Growing up in Mexico, Lesly repeatedly heard traditional Nahuatl stories of leadership, friendship and community and holds these values to this day. As an undocumented person, she speaks to the lack of support and resources for undocumented students, and aspires to bring light to hidden voices within undocumented communities by pursuing graduate school.



# THUAN-HUONG DOAN (she/her)

## University of California Los Angeles

*I believe that bringing stark social justice issues to the forefront of people's minds – whether through the news cycle, word-of-mouth or grassroots efforts – is key to achieving health equity. It should be written in our legislation that equitable healthcare is a right, not a privilege.*



Thuan-Huong (Pearl) is in her senior year at UC Los Angeles and plans to be a physician-scientist providing quality healthcare to individuals impacted by HIV and STIs. She currently performs clinical research evaluating whether STI self-test kits can reduce stigma for men of color, in order to inform policymakers of the impact of such biases. She is developing an HIV mRNA vaccine in a lab setting at UCLA. Her social justice approach to health care stems from experiences as a young Vietnamese woman in an anti-Asian community; this taught her that race is more than just skin color, translating to different educational experiences, representation, legislation and treatment. Pearl is the Co-President of the HIV Counseling and Testing Coalition at UCLA, an organization dedicated to offering free HIV rapid testing, counseling, and linkage to care for individuals experiencing homelessness. She is a committee member of Ending the HIV Epidemic of Los Angeles, a program dedicated to reducing HIV stigma through community-based partnerships. She oversees social media campaigns and an e-magazine distributing information about HIV through community channels.

# KAREN GALLEGOS ESTRADA (they/them)

## University of California-Santa Cruz

*Aside from learning about my own identity and helping me come out as queer and gender-nonconforming, providing LGBTQ youth-led trainings to educators allowed me to feel heard while expressing the needs of my community....The opportunity to lead allowed me to grow comfortable advocating for the youth in our district, which I hope to continue doing as an educator in the future...*



Karen is a freshman studying medical research at UC Santa Cruz and is the first in their family to attend college. They identify as an undocumented queer non-binary activist with intersectional identities. They found their voice through LGBTQ trainings and a DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) internship, and by speaking up for those in their community that could not, and encouraging those who could. They aim to give back and support their own community. Through the DACA internship, Karen supports 200 clients submit DACA applications and renewals, all while navigating and learning the process for their own path to citizenship. Karen has presented to a local foundation, and a Congressman and Assemblywoman to bring awareness to the need for a pathway to citizenship and accessible education and resources. They raised \$23,000 in funds to cover hundreds of \$495 application fees.



# JILLIAN GRAY (she/her)

## College of Charleston

*I have always had a passion for social justice issues. I will not stop until equity is achieved internationally; the war is still raging on and I am proud to be a part of that fight.*



Jillian is a senior at the College of Charleston in South Carolina majoring in Public Health with Biology and Chemistry minors. She hopes to attend medical school to pursue a career in Public Health. She holds leadership positions as President of Rho Lambda, an all-female Greek Honor society, and as Vice President of Women in STEM. Jillian interned in the Maryland House of Delegates, researching and drafting bills, testifying on proposed legislation, and meeting with senators, delegates and the governor. As a representative for the Maryland Association of Student Councils, she lobbied for gun reform. She helped get the word “consent” incorporated into all health and sex education classes statewide, upending South Carolina law mandating abstinence-only sex education, thereby reducing some of the nation’s highest rates of unwanted pregnancy and STDs/STIs. She also helped institute a now mandatory comprehensive sex ed curriculum for freshman at the College of Charleston. As Executive Vice President of Alpha Delta Pi, she created three new positions focused on diversity, inclusion and wellness, and taught workshops on microaggressions, implicit biases and LGBTQIA+ allyship. For this work, Jillian received the Dorothy Shaw Leader Award, the highest honor bestowed upon a collegian member of Alpha Delta Pi.

# DAYANA HENDERSON (she/her)

## Pennsylvania State University

*For Pedro to be diagnosed at the age of 17, and rather than be angry at the world or embarrassed about his diagnosis, he used it to educate and advocate. He was not afraid to discuss his sexuality, his status or be an activist. This should be a lesson to us all. I want to eradicate the stigma, fear, exclusion, discrimination and hate surrounding HIV/AIDS, and free those that have lived in the shadows of shame.*



Dayana is in her junior year at Penn State in Harrisburg, declaring her major in Public Policy with a minor in Political Science. She is proud to be the first in her family to graduate from high school and attend college. Highly motivated, she has already earned an A.A. degree in criminal justice from her local community college. The AIDS epidemic is very personal and hits close to home for Dayana raised by her mother who lost both parents to AIDS six months apart. Dayana wants to focus her career on shattering the stigma associated with AIDS that her grandparents endured, as well as the shame around their sexual identities. She wants to be a voice for the families in her own African-American community who need help and deserve justice, and to be a role model for future generations.



# KATHLEEN HOANG (she/they)

Columbia University



*In [my grandfather's] honor, I hope to return to the rural villages of Vietnam one day and help develop sustainable infrastructure for education.*

Kathleen, a sophomore, majored in International Relations at the University of Pennsylvania, before transferring to Columbia University in New York City to major in Human Rights. The first in her family to attend college, her activism was shaped by their refugee experience, prompting her work with OCA Greater Houston where she recruited Asian American youth to become engaged in the electoral process. She interned for city council members in Houston and Philadelphia, drafting legislation and working to address educational disparities among BIPOC students. A firm believer in education as power, Kathleen focuses on community healing and restorative justice. As a teaching assistant for University of Pennsylvania's Asian American Human Rights & Civil Rights seminar, she coordinated partnerships with Philadelphia-based organizations and mentored upperclassmen in nonprofit programming. Serving on UPenn's Asian American Undergraduate Advisory Board, she assisted in developing one of only two Ivy League Asian American ethnic studies programs. She is currently conducting research in diasporic literature and Asian migration with Pulitzer Prize-winning author and refugee Viet Thanh Nguyen, and serves as a National Research Council Member with Girls Leadership to conduct the first-ever national study on Asian American leadership development. After graduating, she hopes to pursue a Ph.D. and advance the field of Southeast Asian refugee crises and the educational disparities that often follow.

# ISABELLA IGBANUGO (she/her)

American University



*I want the torch I hold to be a beacon of love so bright that homes overflowing with healing become inevitable, and love leaves no bruises.*

Isabella is a senior putting herself through school at American University in Washington, D.C., as a Justice and Law major. She aspires to pursue a Masters in Social Work/Public Health. She is the daughter of a Nigerian immigrant and grew up in a community where trauma is often inherited instead of healed. Through a public health lens, she plans to help others overcome intergenerational trauma prevalent in communities of color due to domestic and familial violence. Throughout college, she has worked at the Children's Defense Fund and currently is an advocate at a domestic violence shelter. She also founded the Sunlight Project, a nonprofit that uses the love of art and poetry to fundraise for organizations fighting to eliminate trauma in the home. Isabella likens Pedro Zamora's HIV/AIDS advocacy on behalf of future generations to her own fight to help African-American communities access compassionate and equitable access to public health-oriented violence prevention resources and break the cycle of intergenerational trauma. Ultimately, she wants to create a national network of well-funded, trauma-informed, culturally competent shelters for victims of color, providing access to transitional housing, transportation, nutritious food, medical assistance, mental healthcare, and on-site lawyers and health professionals.



# KAYSYN JONES (they/them)

## Florida State University

*Art, at its core, has always been a way to clarify and give meaning to difficult times. I intend to passionately support the arts as a tool of mental health services as I move forward in my education.*



Kaysyn is a freshman studying entrepreneurship at FSU in Tallahassee and is the first in their family to pursue a four-year degree. They are focused on sharing the power of art – performing, creating and exhibiting art – in telling our stories and supporting mental health. Kaysyn writes poetry and performs spoken word. They have experienced discrimination and mistrust because of who they are leading to depression and mental health challenges. They have focused much of their activism around artistic expression, mapping it as a cornerstone of the HIV/AIDS activism movement. Kaysyn was an executive director of the Black Art Club at the Douglas Anderson School of the Arts, created to provide a space for Black student artists to share their work, have discussions, create and be innovative. They organized the club’s art gallery this past year, which hosted a combination of poetry and visual art, all of which focused on students’ connection to Blackness, community and joy, culminating in a spoken word performance. Kaysyn plans to work in nonprofit settings to continue promoting mental health awareness for underprivileged youth and youth of color across the United States.

# MARYANN NWUDE (she/they)

## Virginia Tech University

*As decision-making software has many applications in our daily lives, existing bias perpetuates inequality in education, advertising and employment....By mitigating harmful biases, AI technology has the potential to provide effective resources, quality services and innovative solutions to marginalized communities.*



Maryann is a freshman at Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg, VA, studying computer sciences through an activist lens, calling out algorithmic biases that lead to social justice inequities and unfair outcomes for marginalized individuals in technology spaces. As a Black, self-identified Demigirl, Maryann has experienced homophobia within their own community, as well as in technology spaces that should be accessible to all, but instead are designed with inherent biases that negatively impact people of color and LBGTQ+ users. Maryann has worked to improve the lives of marginalized young people by organizing and delivering care packages to youth-serving homeless shelters and LBGTQ+ organizations; has raised funds to help those struggling with poverty, to improve schools and to support recycling efforts. Maryann was a founder of their school’s Rainbow Club and created a judgement-free safe space, spread LBGTQIA+ awareness, and fought for social change. As the club’s Public Relations Officer, they expanded membership and engaged in deep discussions about the intersectional of queer issues and race, such as the pressures placed on black women, rampant homophobia and generational trauma.



# IJEOMA OKORO (she/her)

## University of Maryland

*Service through volunteering, health care and advocacy is so important to me because I benefited from the volunteers helping my family after my mother's paralysis. They showed me how to be resilient, overcome my struggles and adversity to help those around me.*



Ijeoma is a sophomore majoring in Public Health Science in the Scholars Program at University of Maryland in College Park. She is the eldest daughter in her immigrant family, becoming the matriarch figure when her own mother was disabled during a medical procedure, sparking Ijeoma's interest in health care. She is a research intern at the National Institutes of Health in Baltimore, studying the effects of ketamine administration. She also completed the NIH's HiSTEP program where she learned biomedical data analysis and research techniques in the National Human Genome Research Institute. She holds leadership positions at UMD's chapter of the Charles Drew Health Club; at SOUL, a club dedicated to empowering black women; and at Scholars in Action where she was bestowed with a community service leadership award. She is in numerous clubs addressing mental health/healthcare and race-based bias, and interns to reduce opioid misuse in rural communities. She also participates in ORA-USA and its DC chapter, an organization for Igbo Nigerians in America to support Igbo in Nigeria through health mission trips and multi-sector Igbo development. She has sat and is currently on commissions serving children, youth and the juvenile justice system.

# DARBY PORTER (she/her)

## University of South Carolina

*Developing a treatment for HAND is imperative for HIV+ individuals having the high quality of life they deserve. I am working on understanding the relationship between HIV proteins that infect the brain and the human proteins they interact with, the cause of the cognitive decline of HAND....I am dedicated to improving the lives of individuals living with HIV through my neuroscience research and working in outreach to my local community.*



Now a senior at University of South Carolina in Columbia, Darby's education and career trajectory took an unexpected turn three years ago when she joined a research project in an emerging field of HIV study—HIV-associated neurocognitive disorders (HAND). An estimated 50% of all HIV+ individuals are living with HAND, a condition resulting from viral infection in the central nervous system. Darby's research group aims to develop the first FDA-approved medication for HAND. She worked full time during the summer and part time during the school year to advance this medication, has presented at national conferences, and has been published in a peer-reviewed journal on the subject. She volunteers at a community health clinic, is certified through the CDC and the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control to test individuals for HIV, and provided education about cART, PrEP and PeP while assisting individuals with HIV access affordable medical care.



# ARELI ROSALES (she/her)

## University of Texas at San Antonio

*I plan to dedicate my life to serving people with mental health issues like the people that helped me through my own journey....I work to elevate a safer and more understanding community with those struggling with mental health, especially in a city with a Latino machismo culture.*

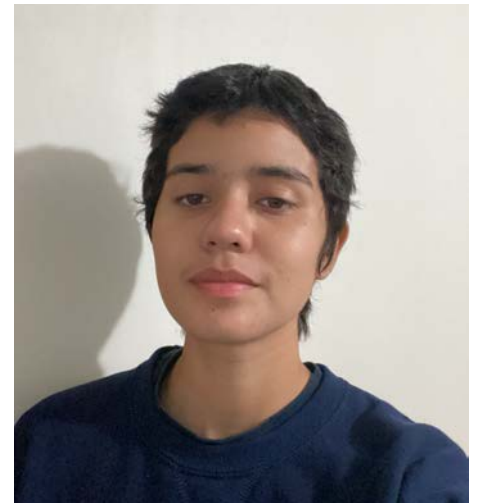


Areli is a freshman at University of Texas at San Antonio studying to be a psychologist, and the first in her family to attend college. Growing up in her Mexican household, conversations about one's mental health or sexual identity were non-existent. For Areli, like so many LGBTQ+ teenagers, the stigma and fears associated with coming out led to a suicide attempt. It was during her stay at a mental health center that Areli learned she was not alone, and that so many other young people were struggling with pain and traumas. When she returned home, young people sought her out to ask for help; this empowered Areli to found her own nonprofit, 915MentalHealth. The organization grew quickly with thousands of followers and was featured in news articles and on local network stations. The inspiration and sense of purpose propelled Areli and she became a Texas Student Representative for the national mental health organization, Work2BeWell. With her degree, she plans to spread mental health awareness and resources, and advocate for those struggling to find courage and community by sharing their stories.

# LEO SANABRIA (he/him)

## Duke University

*After much reflection, I realized that abandoning my community will only encourage the very problems I've been trying to escape, from poverty and violence to discrimination and inequality. Instead, I must work to uplift my community.*



Leo is a freshman pre-med student at Duke University in Durham, NC. As a second-generation Mexican American, he has organized blood drives, and food, clothing and hygiene drives to distribute supplies to his own community and others in need. He has worked on political campaigns, been an academic tutor and martial arts trainer; and has co-authored and helped pass a school district resolution to address inequality in arts education. An avid writer, Leo has done the hard work of embracing his full self, his culture and his heritage to overcome years of internal criticism. He intends to establish a medical office in the same area where he grew up and provide the health services that were unavailable to his family and friends, nurturing the community that nurtured him. In college, he plans to conduct research to advance the AIDS/HIV movement, while continuing to advocate, uplift and support BIPOC communities and marginalized individuals.





# EDWIN SANTOS (he/him)

## American University

*After practicing law and fighting to seek justice within the civil and criminal justice systems, I hope to one day hold a position—either at the local, state, or federal level—where I can create a positive influence for individuals whose voices are underrepresented and unheard.*



Edwin is a sophomore on track to graduate in 2025 from American University in Washington, D.C., with an undergraduate degree in Legal Studies from the Politics, Policy and Law Scholars Program and a graduate degree in Public Administration. He plans to attend law school to advocate for those in our civil and criminal justice systems who deserve justice but do not have the resources to obtain effective legal representation. The first in his family to attend college, he co-founded and serves as co-president of Latinos En Acción, a chapter of the largest immigrant youth-led network, United We Dream. In addition to working as a civil and criminal litigator, he hopes to influence public policies so that they represent all demographics, ensure equity and do not foster systemic barriers for minorities. Outside of the campus setting, he has volunteered with Asian Pacific Islander American Public Affairs; Legal Aid Justice Center Rent Relief Program; Capital Area Food Bank's Public Policy Department; and the Capital Area Immigrants' Rights Coalition Detained Adult Program

# ELIZABETH SOYEMI (she/her)

## Brown University

*I have seen the disconnect in youth engagement within the political sphere which strengthens my desire to further involve youth and others in the policy aspect of creating sustainable healthcare change.*



Elizabeth is a first year student studying at Brown University in Providence, RI, through the Open Curriculum program enabling her to integrate all her academic interests—public health, policy, economics and technology—to build a holistic approach to combating maternal health inequity and racial injustices among women of color. She has been a Research Assistant at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine learning about the social and clinical factors contributing to maternal mortality. She founded Med4Minorities, a space to explore racial inequities in the healthcare field and guide Black and Latinx youth towards success in the medical field. She has raised thousands of dollars to donate over 20,000 menstrual products to local shelters where menstrual inequity remains prevalent. She has presented a TEDx talk on the significance of education in the menstrual movement, and has interned with State Representative Barbara Hernandez who champions menstrual equity bills in Illinois. Elizabeth aspires to become an OB/GYN and open women's health clinics in low-income areas to combat a complex system of health disparities including maternal mortality, menstrual health equity, and mother & child birthing care.



# ESMERALDA YZGUERRA (she/her)

## University of Southern California

*As we raise awareness and destigmatize in the case of HIV/AIDS, we can move toward a more accepting society that does not demonize this virus nor turn an eye on unequal access to justice.*



Esmeralda, a senior, was inspired to join the progressive degree program at USC in Los Angeles to attain a Master's in Public Administration while working at JusticeCorps, an AmeriCorps program committed to equal access to justice for self-representing family law litigants. At JusticeCorps, she sees how economic and language barriers prevent people from successfully navigating the court system. She aspires to start a nonprofit organization helping underserved communities like her own. Esmeralda has experienced firsthand how racial and ethnic stereotyping limits equity and fairness in society. She believes education and sharing stories will help raise awareness and mitigate these systemic injustices.



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Congratulations to all seventeen scholars for the 2022/2023 school year. This class of awardees is the largest and most diverse in the history of the program with nearly 40% being the first in their families to pursue a college degree.

Special thanks to our presenting partner



For more information about the Pedro Zamora Young Leaders Scholarship, including how to apply, please visit [aidsmemorial.org/scholarships](https://aidsmemorial.org/scholarships).