NEWS RELEASE

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National AIDS Memorial Nurtures Emerging Health and Social Justice Activists Through Academic Scholarships

Call for Applicants for the 2024-2025 Academic Year Opens March 1

SAN FRANCISCO, February 15, 2024 — The National AIDS Memorial’s Pedro Zamora Young Leaders Scholarship application for Fall 2024 funding reopens March 1, 2024. Information about the program can be found at aidsmemorial.org/scholarships. Applicants must demonstrate how they are providing service and/or leadership in efforts to end HIV or help those living with it and/or are involved in efforts to fight against stigma, denial, racism, and hate in all forms, and how their studies, career plans or public service will contribute to advancing health and social justice. The application closes on July 15. Awardees will be notified by September 1.

The Scholarship honors the late Zamora’s legacy as an AIDS educator and advocate against stigma and prejudice. At the age of 22, Zamora captivated the nation with his openness, compassion, vitality, and charisma when he appeared on MTV’s The Real World 3: San Francisco in 1994. Pedro spoke openly about his sexuality, status, and activism. Pedro’s work was tragically cut short when he died of an AIDS-related illness in 1994, the morning after the final episode of The Real World aired.

The Scholarship brings recognition and visibility to outstanding young people by supporting their higher education endeavors and who, like Pedro, are making a profound impact advancing health and social justice issues.

Awarded annually, the Scholarship is funded through major support provided by Gilead Sciences and individual donors. Since its inception in 2009, the program has provided more than $600,000 in support to 154 undergraduate students.

“This Scholarship supports young people who demonstrate a passion for health and social justice and are working for advocacy and change,” said National AIDS Memorial CEO John Cunningham. “They are carrying Pedro’s torch forward, pursuing careers and community work that will have a positive impact. Their optimism, action, authenticity, and commitment are truly inspiring and provide immense hope for the future.”

The Scholarship strives for equity across all lines. From increasing outreach and awards to students attending Historically Black Universities and Colleges (“HBCUs”) and Hispanic Serving Institutions (“HISIs”) to expanding visibility for LGBTQ+ students, this Scholarship strives to ensure that young activists from all walks of life have the opportunity to advance the causes Pedro championed and make a difference in historically marginalized communities.

The National AIDS Memorial announced its recent Scholarship awardees for the 2023-2024 academic year, its largest and most diverse class ever, providing awards in the amount of $5,000 each to 25 students attending 20 universities and academic institutions from across the country.
This most recent class of awardees identify as 64% female, 24% male, 4% trans, and 12% gender non-conforming. 48% identify as Black or African American, 20% White, 16% Hispanic or Latino, 8% Asian, 4% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 4% two or more races; 48% identify as Heterosexual/ Straight, 28% Bisexual/Panssexual, 16% Gay/Lesbian, and 4% Queer. 40% are the first in their family to attend college. They hail from the following colleges and universities (ten of which are HBCUs) in eleven states and the District of Columbia:

**California:** Fatima Zeferino Santos, California State University, Long Beach; Kei Gallegos Estrada, UC-Santa Cruz; Arianna Lawrence, Pomona College; Kelly Lin, UC-Berkeley; Chazifer Mills, UC-Berkeley.

**Colorado:** Gavin Hood, University of Denver. **District of Columbia:** Salihah ‘Sasa’ Aakil, Howard University; Edwin Santos, American University; Sheila McKinney, Howard University; Kimiah Jacobs, Howard University; Aneesah Lawrence, Howard University; Mikayla Williams, Howard University. **Florida:** Khalil-Lullah Ballentine, Florida A&M University; Kayla Baptiste, Florida Atlantic University. **Georgia:** Kelsey Schaffer, Spelman College. **Massachusetts:** Lily Chen, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Thangam Hugalavalli, Brandeis University. **North Carolina:** Mia Dent, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. **Texas:** Kefi Ubwenge, Texas Southern University. **Vermont:** Zane Zapan, University of Vermont. **Virginia:** Andrea Martinez Alvarado, Virginia Commonwealth University; Kayla Williford-Jones, Hampton University. **Washington:** Nora VanRees, University of Washington Seattle; Remi Rogoff, Western Washington University. **Wisconsin:** Bailey Nez, Lawrence University. Bios for each awardee can be found at aidsmemorial.org/scholarships.

“Once again, this is an outstanding class of awardees, each clearly committed to realizing a healthier and more equitable future for people in every community,” said Alex Kalomparis, Senior Vice President, Gilead Sciences. “Gilead is proud to support this Scholarship developing the next generation of leaders in Pedro Zamora’s honor in the fight to end not only HIV through action and advocacy, but also the stigma, discrimination, and societal inequities that contribute to the HIV epidemic.”

In line with the intent of the Scholarship, these recent awardees are set to make a powerful difference as young leaders working on a range of issues, including HIV/AIDS, arts and community development, mental health, undocumented and migrant community rights, race- and gender-based health care equity, LGBTQ+ activism, environmental racism, Islamophobia, algorithmic biases, criminal justice, domestic violence, and human rights.

Mia Dent, who is pursuing her undergraduate, then graduate, degrees focused on nonprofit leadership and legislative policy, says, “We cannot address racial injustice without examining the role of voting disenfranchisement and redlining in relation to Communities of Color. In choosing my career path of focusing on environmental causes, I build upon my volunteerism in politics, gender-based justice organizations, and fundraising for Trans Youth to address the need for environmental justice and ending environmental racism.”

“Like Pedro Zamora, I’ve embodied the spirit of activism,” says Edwin Santos, who is majoring in Legal Studies at American University as part of the 3-year Politics, Policy and Law Scholars Program. “My work has surrounded itself with fighting against discrimination, stigma, and hate toward immigrants and Latinos across the U.S.”

**About the National AIDS Memorial**

The mission of the National AIDS Memorial is to share the story of the struggle against HIV/AIDS and to remember in perpetuity the lives lost, offer healing and hope to survivors, and inspire new generations of activists in the fight against stigma, denial and hate for a just future. Through the National AIDS Memorial Grove, the AIDS Memorial Quilt and other community-driven programs across the country, the National AIDS Memorial ensures that the story of AIDS and the AIDS movement is never forgotten, and uplifts today’s health and social justice issues to help the nation heal, remember, thrive, and continue to work for a just and equitable future. Learn more at www.aidsmemorial.org.

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