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 [Helmer, Conley & Kasselman Annual College Scholarship](https://www.helmerlegal.com/college-scholarship/)

My goals in life have evolved due to my upbringing in two households that could not be more different regarding economic security. It seems like my dad has been in legal trouble ever since I was a baby. He believed that his only option for survival was to live a high life on the streets to secure his family's financial and physical well-being. My father and his family (his mother, his sister, his brother, and his nephew) were chronically homeless throughout my childhood, forcing us to play a deadly game of "musical houses" to establish stability. On the other hand, if I moved back in with my mom, we would be in a quiet area populated by retirees, and I wouldn't have to worry about finding a place to sleep each night. The first time I went to see my dad, I learned to compare my own life and the lives of my relatives for the first time, and I finally began to comprehend what it meant to be really disadvantaged.

During each winter and spring break, I would visit my father's relatives in their hometown. My dad, grandma, and four cousins all lived in two bedrooms, and I learned a lot about the world by being there. In other words, I was no longer allowed the luxury of sleeping in peace. While my grandmother slept on the sofa or a chair in the corner of the room, my two cousins and I shared a bed. Since it would be difficult to feed a family of seven with just takeout or delivery, I had to eat whatever was in the home when my stomach started growling.

Something that my grandma and aunt came up with was completely unfamiliar to me. Even if I paid for my own meal or beverage, I was not permitted to do so if there wasn't enough to go around. My younger cousin's wardrobe became a dumping ground for my “misplaced”

belongings whenever it was time for me to return home to my lavish lifestyle. A more typical person in my position would have responded with hostility, but I've learned to put myself in their shoes instead. I decided to devote my life to assisting the poor and disadvantaged.

As I made the jump from middle school to high school, I became involved in several clubs and activities that would prepare me to become a transformative leader and speed up the development of my local and global society. This involved being accepted into the top 5 criminal justice magnets in Miami Dade County Public Schools. As a student in the Criminal Justice Magnet, I had the opportunity to network with many influential leaders in the criminal justice community. Due to my passion for the field of study, I was recruited to join the Florida Public Service Association to compete against other students as it relates to the skills one may

encounter as a police officer or attorney. Due to Covid-19, I was no longer able to participate in my school’s club due to health guidelines. However, enrolling into dual enrollment classes with Miami Dade College, provided me with opportunities to learn about Political Science and Criminal Justice in a remote environment. Currently, I am on track to graduate with my Associates in Arts degree which will allow me to segway into a Political Science Bachelors of Arts degree. With the knowledge and confidence I gained from these opportunities, I will be able to continue my education at a four-year institution where I can further develop my talents and find my academic and professional voice. In the future, once I've completed law school, I want to defend people who cannot otherwise afford an attorney for free and are facing severe penalties

for their crimes. I want to dedicate my life to public service to effect positive change in the world. To that end, I want to run for Congress and advocate for legislation that will positively affect communities both near and far.

For now, I have created an organization that is geared towards assisting students in disadvantaged communities with accessing pre-college programs and assistance with the college application process. All my life, I’ve attended schools in poor communities and there was limited access to pre-college programs that teach students about college preparation. At an early age, my mother knew that my father would not be capable of helping with my post-secondary pursuits since he currently provides no financial assistance to cover my personal expenses. Every summer since 6th grade, I’ve taken accelerated courses. I first started taking high school courses each summer while I was in middle school and once I enrolled into high school, I began taking college courses. These small sacrifices put me into position to participate in Florida International University’s (FIU) Upward Bound and FIU’s National Scholars Association program. The

directors and staff at FIU assisted me with identifying my post-secondary options and the process one must take to acquire a college degree. I had the opportunity to meet students from different schools who had similar family dynamics and experiences like myself. I found these

connections to be important since it could be lonely and challenging when you are one of few students who is on the college accelerated path. When my peers questioned me in school, why they do not have any classes with me, I had to explain the choices I made early in my educational journey to be academically ahead. I noticed that my friends looked jealous that they didn’t know about these opportunities since many of them come from families where college was not promoted. It was at that moment that I started my organization with my family called **Motivated Scholars in Progress.** I assist my peers with developing their personal statements, registering for dual enrollment courses, and I assist with reviewing their college assignments. The students who I’ve helped in the past are currently in college or currently applying to college with the guidance I’ve provided.

With the leadership skills that I gain from my organization, I plan to further my reach by being engaged in College organizations and joining a study abroad program which focuses on the Criminal Justice System. Such experience will allow me to compare the criminal justice system of another country and the United States. I will be able to develop my understanding on how the American system diverge from its historical roots. Importantly, I will be able to examine the development of human society and the impact of social relationships and interactions around the world in the criminal justice system. I find that committing the next 4-5 years of study will provide me with problem-solving, technical and occupation-specific skills to meet the demands for a career in public service.

As Ron Brown once said "Politics, life, and business are not spectator sports. Active participation is crucial to success. Keep the door open, and the ladder lowered for others to climb when you reach the top.” Keeping this motivation in mind, I want to use my time in school and

in the community to effect positive change.