

After Selecting First D&I Scholarship Recipient, Kluger Kaplan Wants Other Firms to Follow Suit

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by Raychel Lean

Miami firm Kluger, Kaplan, Silverman, Katzen & Levine has named the first recipient of a new scholarship aimed at supporting law students of color in South Florida — a move its founding partner said he hopes others will emulate.

The firm selected Florida International University second-year law student Briana Harris, who was a summer law clerk for the Florida Health Justice Project and is a teaching assistant for FIU's legal skills and values course this semester. Harris has already won multiple awards for her law school work, according to the firm.

Kluger Kaplan announced the scholarship in March, naming it after renowned Miami trial attorney and professor H.T. Smith, who helped structure the initiative. Racial justice issues and the legal profession's lack of diversity are problems

that aren't going to fix themselves, Smith said at the time, reasoning, “We need people of goodwill who, with intention and purpose, are trying to help to solve this problem.”

Every year, the recipient will get \$10,000 toward attending eligible Florida law schools, and be considered for a summer clerkship at Kluger Kaplan and a possible attorney position after graduating. The eligible universities are: the University of Miami, Florida International University, Nova Southeastern University, St. Thomas University, Florida State University and the University of Florida.

Here's how it's going.

Alan Kluger, founding partner at Kluger Kaplan

Out of the pool of applicants from students across the state, what stood out about Briana Harris and why was she selected as the inaugural scholarship recipient?



Courtesy photo

Florida International University law student Briana Harris, who was chosen by Kluger, Kaplan, Silverman, Katzen & Levine as the recipient of the first H.T. Smith Legal Studies Scholarship.

While Kluger Kaplan received many impressive applications from Florida law school students, Briana's resume was outstanding based on her undergraduate record at Vanderbilt University and her superior law school grades.

Her interview was also fabulous and demonstrated her strong leadership qualities, a dedication to learning about the practice of law, and a passion for community involvement. These values align

closely with those of Kluger Kaplan, and that made her an excellent candidate for the H.T. Smith Legal Studies scholarship.

What advice do you have for other South Florida law firms who are looking to expand diversity and inclusion efforts within their firm and in the legal industry as a whole?

In Hebrew there's a word that means follow me, "Aharai," that officers in the Israeli army follow when they stand on the frontlines. The concept is if you are really going to lead, you have to lead by action.

The legal profession in South Florida has been behind in this, but you don't need a whole lot of action to change the metrics. If you had 10 firms creating similar initiatives, you would have a dynamic that overshoots the mark within three years. There is no lack of good will, there's just inaction. But they both get you to the same place.

Having diversity in our community requires intentional, coordinated, positive, action. Kluger Kaplan's goal for the scholarship is to create more opportunities for underserved students and encourage the legal community to take proactive, tangible steps to promote diversity and inclusion.

If you can get a conversation going with people who want to make a difference and have the ability to, you begin to see change.

Briana Harris

Can you tell us more about your background and what receiving the H.T. Smith Legal Studies Scholarship means to you?

I am a native South Floridian and decided to return home after I received my undergraduate degree from Vanderbilt University. I knew that, whatever career path I took, I wanted to give back to my community. This scholarship has been such an honor to receive and it reaffirmed that I am on the right path and that my hard work is paying off. When I was notified and finally processed the news, I felt a weight lift off my shoulders because the scholarship would help me significantly with the cost of law school and eliminated the stress of finding an internship for the summer. I am so grateful to have been granted this opportunity.

What made you decide to pursue your law degree at FIU Law after receiving your Bachelor's in Medicine, Health and Society?

I always thought that I wanted to be a doctor, which is what influenced me to choose my undergraduate major. However, during the med school application process, as I wrote my personal statement, I began to realize that patient care wasn't the path for me, nor was it my passion.

After talking with a mentor, I learned that there are so many



Alan Kluger

Courtesy photo

ways, other than becoming a physician, to impact and change the healthcare system and the issues of public health. One of those ways is through the law and legal system. I came to this realization at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, which further fueled my decision to apply to law school and a Master of Public Health program.

What are your career goals and how do you hope to intertwine your public health education with your legal career?

I know that the legal system has a strong influence on public health in many ways, including policies that affect access and quality of care. I am hoping that in my career, I will make changes to the healthcare system and create equitable access to healthcare for all people, especially minority and vulnerable populations.

I am still in the early stages of both my legal and public health education, but I hope that as I get deeper in my studies, I will have a clearer image of how my interests will merge and complement each other in my career.