

Greetings,

Please accept this statement as my interest in applying for the Samuel Halperin Youth Public Service Award. There are multiple reasons why I deserve this Award. In December of 2017, I was able to complete one of my biggest personal and professional goals; obtaining the General Education Development diploma. The main reason is that despite being homeless for the past six years, I was successful in obtaining my GED. In addition to obtaining my diploma, I have successfully established my own brand; Good Blend DC.

Growing up, life was incredibly challenging. As a youth, I was neglected and became a victim of physical, verbal, and emotional abuse. As a homeless youth in the District of Columbia, I was forced to depend on individuals who did not have my best interest in mind. Professionally, I was treated as expendable labor, and I was personally blamed for being homeless. Fortunately, this mistreatment did not diminish my work ethic. At the age of sixteen I decided that the only way to free myself from the abuse was to run away to Miami Florida; the furthest I could be from my father. Despite being so young and extremely far away from home, I gained valuable experience.

While I was in Miami, instead of resorting to illegal activity to survive, I developed skills in sales and marketing. I learned how to effectively network in order to achieve personal and professional goals. In addition, given my age, I was forced to work under an undocumented status. Further traumatized by the challenges I faced in Miami, I decided it would be best to return home. Additionally, I missed my community of friends and the support and love we provide each other.

In November 2012, after I turned eighteen years old, I returned to Washington, D.C. Even though I was returning to the source of the abuse, I purchased a bus ticket with money that I had earned and returned to my city. During this entire process, my friends were able to communicate with me and keep hope alive. My intention upon returning home was to pursue my educational goals and give back to the community.

Upon returning, I joined the Workforce Investment for Successful Employment program, operated by the Latin American Youth Center. This program helped me to understand what my strengths and weaknesses were. Four years passed by, but I experienced little progression. Over those four years, I began losing faith and was ready to give up. When WISE lost funding and the teachers I entrusted with my education began to quit, I started to doubt my own abilities. Unfortunately, when program shut down for four months, it left many of the students confused about what to do next. When the program re-opened, I immediately passed the practice tests for reading and writing, math, social studies, and science, all on the first try despite all of the troubles that WISE faced.

Something that has been able to keep me balanced in my personal life is skateboarding. Through skateboarding I have been afforded opportunities to mentor youth in the community. I do collaborative work with the Kennedy Center at Shaw Skate Park for the DC Funk parade and also help with their annual Finding a Line event held at the Kennedy

Center. As a Skateboarding Ambassador, I am known for bringing community members together to ensure no one is left out as the city undergoes massive change and development. Annually, I organize the resources necessary to throw a Halloween skateboarding contest in the District. The second year I decided to have this event, I was recognized by Muriel Bowser for all of the volunteer work I have been doing; she graciously allotted funds for current and future events. Halloween night 2017, we held the 4<sup>th</sup> annual contest. We do not receive support from our local skate shop, but we are still expected to financially support them. Sadly, I have to reach out to shops outside of the District of Columbia for support.

The reason why I mentioned all of these things is because of the fact that my goal is to be able to own a multi-manufacturing warehouse for the skateboarding community in Washington, D.C. We deserve our own workspace especially because I have a lot of talented brothers in the community that need to maintain their jobs to support their children and keep their housing stable. The solution is to create opportunities for those interested getting paid professional wages and improving their education. Skateboarding is the glue that has held my community and my life together. Skateboarding is the outlet through which all of my goals can be made possible.

Finally, my desired field of study is Business Management with a minor in Public Relations. Due to the love I have for people, I realize that I have been doing this work voluntarily for years. I am passionate about how things should be done and always find the right team to put together when it comes to projects. In addition, I have started an annual poetry slam, and fundraiser in support of women's awareness. On the behalf of Samuel Halperin Youth Service, this award will truly help me continue to positively impact my community.

Kindly,

Harrison Rodriguez

1/4/2018