(November 8, 2021) NEW YORK, NY — The Scherman Foundation announced today that Gisela Alvarez has been appointed as its new Senior Program Officer. Before joining the Foundation, Ms. Alvarez led the Donors’ Education Collaborative (DEC), a funder collaborative dedicated to improving New York City’s public schools through system-wide policy reform, at The New York Community Trust. Prior to DEC, Gisela was the Senior Project Director at Advocates for Children of New York (AFC), an organization dedicated to protecting every child’s right to an education, focused on children from low-income backgrounds. During her time at AFC, Ms. Alvarez founded and directed four legal services programs and led city, state, and national policy initiatives that achieved reforms that are still in practice today. In these roles, Ms. Alvarez led diverse coalitions; coordinated statewide campaigns; represented AFC on think tanks and task forces; wrote policy reports and developed advocacy platforms; served as a media spokesperson; provided training to hundreds of parents, students, and professionals; and represented families in school-related matters. A graduate of Harvard and New York University School of Law, she and her family live in Brooklyn where her two sons attend New York City public schools.

“I am honored to join The Scherman Foundation in supporting community-led change in New York City and beyond,” said Ms. Alvarez. “Its mission—building a more just, equitable, democratic, and sustainable society—is exactly what we need in this moment.”
The Foundation is excited to welcome her unique perspective, collaborative expertise, and leadership experience. “Gisela has that rare combination of a sharp analytical mind and a deep-seated appreciation for grassroots leadership and our grantees’ challenges,” said the Foundation’s President Mike Pratt. “The staff and board are thrilled that she has joined our team.”

Ms. Alvarez succeeds former Program Director Alexa Avilés, who worked at the Foundation for ten years before her successful run for New York City Council representing District 38. During her time at the Foundation, first as Program Officer from 2011 and then Program Director in 2016, Ms. Avilés skillfully managed the Reproductive Rights and Justice, Democracy, and Human Rights and Liberties programs and co-managed the Arts and Strengthening New York Communities programs.

The Foundation’s staff and board are immensely grateful for the knowledge and fierce passion for community, organizing, and advocacy she brought to its grantmaking, as well as her crucial contributions to the Foundation’s expanding commitment to racial justice.

“Alexa’s unerring instinct for justice has helped drive the Foundation for more than a decade,” said Mr. Pratt. “We are so much better for it. While we are sad to see her go, our loss is the city’s greater gain.”

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