My name is Aiyanna Vaughan. I am soon to be 21 years old, and I am from Richmond, Virginia. I’m a first-generation college student currently striving to make my aspirations a reality by pursuing a bachelor’s degree in biology with a conservation biology minor from Old Dominion University. I am a rising senior, set to graduate in December of 2021, where I will then go on to obtain my masters. I don’t have a riveting story to tell, I have been fortunate enough to never have to struggle and to come from a family that has always been loving and supportive, and for that I can’t be more thankful. My story is centered around my passion which is animals and the environment.

I have been captivated with wildlife and the outdoors for as long as I can remember. My favorite place is the beach, and some of my favorite memories are of coming home from school as a child, grabbing a snack, and turning on the tv to watch no other than Steve Irwin. The love, compassion, and courage he displayed when it came to animals was one that I admired. It was remarkable, and I wanted to be the exact same way. I accredit Steve for my interest in every wild animal from mammals to reptiles. Of course, my interactions with animals started off with small domesticated pets. My mom once told me that she knew I had a passion for animals and would grow to work with them when we once visited our local shelter when I was a child in hopes of finding a cat. After begging to take home every animal I came across I told her I wanted to free all the animals that were there. In high school I took courses in small animal care and veterinary science, where we would volunteer at our local animal shelter to gain experience in handling small animals. From there my aspirations were to be a vet, then a marine biologist, until I finally discovered wildlife conservation.

 I knew I wanted to make a difference in the lives of animals I just wasn’t sure how. Being a veterinarian seemed ideal until I thought of the medical aspect of the job. I was then set on marine biology until I met my evolution teacher, Michael Harvey, my junior year at Old Dominion. He talked about how he considered himself a conservationist, and the work that he’s done, and I realized that is ideally what I would be interested in. Wildlife conservation is a passion of mine because without the biodiversity we were given the Earth simply would not be the same. Everything has a place on Earth for a reason, and due to the acts of man kind many of these species are losing their spots. Humans are able to advocate for themselves, we are able to speak up when things are unjust. Animals don’t have this luxury, which makes conservation advocacy that much more important.

 My passion for wildlife and the thought of making my parents proud is what drives me to continue daily. While the path may be rocky at times, I know I have what it takes to achieve my goal of becoming a conservationist. My drive, ability to talk to others of different walks of life, education, and leadership skills will make me the ideal candidate for job openings.