

Press Release

# Two Akerman Partners Shortlisted for Chambers Diversity & Inclusion Awards

May 1, 2023

*Chambers & Partners* has named two Akerman lawyers as finalists for its 2023 Chambers USA Awards, which celebrates firms and individuals who are furthering the advancement of diversity and inclusion across the United States. Healthcare partner Jeremy Burnett is being recognized in Pro Bono Lawyer of the Year category, and litigation partner Grasford Smith is being recognized in the Diversity & Inclusion: Outstanding Contribution category.

“Jeremy and Grasford are extraordinary lawyers who demonstrate a deep understanding and compassion for the issues facing marginalized groups both in the legal system and at-large. They are committed to championing equality, diversity, and inclusion, and are well-deserving of this tremendous honor,” said Scott Meyers, Akerman Chairman and CEO.

## Jeremy Burnette, Atlanta

Burnette is an experienced healthcare litigator and compliance counsel whose deep pro bono commitment has been central to his practice for years, with his pro bono work in 2022 standing as a specifically strong illustration of his devotion to serving others.

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## Related People

Jeremy Burnette  
Scott A. Meyers  
Grasford W. Smith

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## Related Work

Healthcare  
Litigation

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## Related Offices

Atlanta  
Chicago  
West Palm Beach

In 2022, Burnette's commitment to racial justice through pro bono work was fueled by the premise that change within law enforcement cannot happen without transparency. He co-led a team of more than 20 lawyers and staff that partnered with the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights to help build and populate *Accountable Now* – the only comprehensive, open source, publicly available, nationwide use-of-force database providing full transparency into the circumstances and targets of law enforcement use-of-force. Through this national project within Akerman's Racial Justice Initiative, Burnette's team used freedom of information laws to request and obtain data regarding law enforcement use-of-force from 146 jurisdictions across the country. Attorneys and journalists have already used this data to discuss such use-of-force in various communities.

Also in the past year, Burnette stepped up to fight for racial justice alongside a longstanding pro bono client, the National Urban League (NUL). Once again leading by example, Burnette helped launch a national advocacy project aimed at improving parole and probation practices around the United States. This is Burnette's third pro bono project with the NUL's law enforcement reform initiative.

A Board member of the Georgia Asylum and Immigration Network (GAIN), a past president of the Georgia Stonewall Bar Association, and a member of Akerman's Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer & Allies Network Group, Burnette represented a refugee seeking protection in the United States due to past persecution and violence in her home country because of her sexual orientation and gender identity. He also represented a transgender client in need of a gender-affirming name change.

Finally, in 2022 Burnette served as a Pro Bono Champion with the Pro Bono Partnership of Atlanta, through which he accepted the opportunity to provide pro bono compliance counsel to a nonprofit that provides services to children and adults who are

deaf or hard of hearing and helped place several discrete pro bono projects with qualified lawyers within the firm and throughout the Atlanta legal community.

### **Grasford Smith, West Palm Beach**

A partner in Akerman's Litigation Practice Group, Smith focuses his practice on complex commercial litigation matters and is certified by the Supreme Court of Florida as a Circuit Civil Mediator.

Beyond his manifold professional achievements and leadership positions, he maintains a deep commitment to advancing justice, diversity, and inclusion in all that he does. Moving the needle nationally, Smith serves as chair of the Minority Partners in Majority Firms Division and was the chair of Region XI of the National Bar Association, the nation's oldest and largest national network of predominantly African-American attorneys and judges. He acts as national assistant general counsel to the oldest intercollegiate historically African American fraternity Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., and he is also chair of the Commission on Racial Justice.

For the past 12 months, Smith served on a Florida Bar Association Special Committee on Opportunity in the Practice of Law. He also is the chair of the Economic Case for Diversity Subcommittee, analyzing data and establishing the direct relationship between firms with higher shares of Asian, Black, Hispanic, and multi-racial attorneys and higher profits.

On a local level, Smith served as President of the Black Chamber of Commerce of Palm Beach County, Florida. And in 2022, Smith became the Chair of the American Heart Association of Palm Beach County. The Association is actively involved in taking a holistic approach to heart health, including a focus on healthy diets—a matter of critical importance to

individuals in low-income neighborhoods living in “food deserts.”

Chambers Diversity & Inclusion aims to promote the advancement of inclusion across the global legal profession through research, training, workshops, tourism and awards. Its awards represent the culmination of Chambers’ research and celebrate firms and individuals who are furthering the advancement of diversity and inclusion in the United States.

Winners of the Chambers USA Awards will be announced at a virtual ceremony on June 15, 2023.

### **About Akerman**

Akerman LLP is a top 100 U.S. law firm recognized among the most forward-thinking firms in the industry by *Financial Times*. Its more than 700 lawyers and business professionals collaborate with the world’s most successful enterprises and entrepreneurs to navigate change, seize opportunities, and help drive innovation and growth.