

Press Release

Akerman Expands Franchise and Licensing Sector Team with Addition of Partner Eleanor Vaida Gerhards

July 28, 2026

Akerman today announced the addition of Eleanor Vaida Gerhards as a partner in its Franchise and Licensing Sector Team. Eleanor, who is affiliated with the firm's New York office, further strengthens Akerman's nationally recognized platform advising franchisors and other consumer-facing businesses on domestic and international growth strategies. She joins from an Am Law 100 firm, where she served as national co-chair of its Franchising and Distribution Practice Group.

For nearly two decades, Eleanor has served as outside general corporate and franchise counsel to startup and established franchisors, guiding clients through every stage of the franchise lifecycle, from launching new franchise systems to expanding established brands across the United States and internationally. She represents clients across a broad range of industries, including hospitality, restaurants and food service, fitness, health and wellness, retail, and consumer services.

"Eleanor is a highly respected franchise lawyer whose experience aligns with our strategy of helping clients build, expand, and protect their brands in an increasingly complex regulatory and business environment," said Kevin Hein, co-chair of Akerman's Franchise and Licensing Sector Team. "Her deep industry knowledge, practical business

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Eleanor Vaida Gerhards
Kevin Hein

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perspective, and international experience further enhance our ability to serve franchisors and other growth-focused businesses wherever they operate.”

Eleanor counsels franchisors on franchise development, regulatory compliance, state registration matters, franchise disclosure documents, and operational issues. She also advises clients on acquisitions and divestitures involving franchise businesses, supply chain and vendor agreements, advertising fund structures, master franchise and area development arrangements, and the conversion of licensing and distribution models into franchise systems. Her practice includes cross-border franchise matters, helping international brands enter the U.S. market while advising domestic franchisors on global expansion.

In addition, Eleanor advises franchisors on alternative risk management strategies, including captive insurance programs, risk retention groups, and risk purchasing groups. She has also served as a franchise law expert witness in a nine-figure arbitration involving a franchise system.

“Akerman has built an outstanding national platform with a collaborative culture and an impressive roster of clients,” said Eleanor. “I’m excited to join a team that understands the evolving needs of franchisors and entrepreneurs and is committed to helping clients achieve sustainable growth in the U.S. and around the world.”

Recognized nationally for her franchise practice, Eleanor is ranked by *Chambers USA*, named to *Franchise Times’* Legal Eagles Hall of Fame, and recommended by *Lexology Index*. She frequently speaks and writes on emerging issues affecting franchisors, including artificial intelligence, franchise disclosure and compliance, cybersecurity, insurance, and cross-border expansion. She currently serves as chair of the International Franchise Association’s Philadelphia Women’s

Franchise Network, where she advocates for the advancement of women in the franchise industry.

About Akerman

Founded in 1920, Akerman is an Am Law 100 firm recognized by Vault among the nation's most prestigious law firms. The firm has more than 700 lawyers and business professionals throughout the United States.