

Press Release

Akerman to Receive Top Pro Bono Service Award from the Florida Supreme Court and The Florida Bar

January 21, 2015

Firm Once Again Honored for Pro Bono and Philanthropic Commitment to Education and Youth Development

Akerman LLP, a top 100 U.S. law firm serving clients across the Americas, has been selected as the recipient of the 2015 Chief Justice's Law Firm Commendation Award by the Florida Supreme Court and The Florida Bar, the highest recognition of pro bono legal service awarded in the state to a law firm. Nominated by the National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association (CASA), Akerman has been honored for its outstanding philanthropic and pro bono contributions in the areas of education and youth development, and above all, for its dedication to the promotion of volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children in the foster care system.

This is the second consecutive year that the Florida Supreme Court and The Florida Bar have recognized Akerman lawyers for their devotion to pro bono work and for their extraordinary efforts benefiting at-risk youth. Karen Meyer Buesing, a partner with the firm's Labor and Employment Practice Group, was presented with the Tobias Simon Pro Bono Service Award in 2014 by the Hon. Ricky Polston, Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme Court, for her unwavering commitment to the assistance of homeless youth.

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“Akerman is deeply humbled to receive this recognition by the Florida Supreme Court and CASA, and proud of the work this award honors,” said Akerman Chairman and CEO Andrew Smulian. “Our lawyers and staff have a long-standing tradition of doing good and giving back, and a genuine passion for uplifting the lives of disadvantaged youth in our communities. Less than a year ago we initiated the Akerman “Give Back” campaign to build upon the significant foundation of good work and meaningful acts performed by so many Akerman lawyers and staff each day. We are inspired by how many lives have been impacted, and will continue our intense effort to spread the support and services today’s youth need to lead fulfilling and productive lives.”

Akerman made a pledge to achieve even greater impact in the community, particularly in the areas of education and youth development, with the launch of a firm-wide “Give Back” campaign during Foster Care Awareness Month in May 2014. For the inaugural campaign, Akerman became the first law firm to partner nationally with CASA and its local guardian ad litem programs. Since the campaign’s inception, Akerman lawyers and staff across the country have contributed through pro bono legal service, volunteerism and fundraising, having the potential to impact the lives of hundreds of abused and neglected foster children as well as teens aging out of the foster care system.

“The GAL Program is proud of our mission to represent the best interests of Florida’s abused and neglected children,” said Alan Abramowitz, Executive Director of Guardian ad Litem, Florida. “Our advocacy would not be possible without the dedication of organizations like Akerman. Through their support we know Florida’s most vulnerable children are more likely to find a safe, permanent home; receive more services; spend less time in foster care; have increased placement stability, and have better educational outcomes.”

In addition to Akerman's work with CASA/GAL, the firm has carried out several other initiatives over the past year to benefit disadvantaged youth and the learning resources they need to thrive. The firm partnered with private businesses and nonprofit organizations, including: The Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, providing underprivileged youths in Miami-Dade Public Schools, the nation's fourth largest school district, greater access to the world of creative arts, cultural studies and educational enrichment activities; and the Cuban American Bar Association's Special Immigrant Juvenile Pro Bono Project, devoting pro bono legal service to assist unaccompanied minor immigrant children. Akerman also continued its initiative with the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) and Sanford-Burnham Medical Research Institute. As chair of UNCF's Scholarship Committee, Megan DeVault, a partner in Akerman's Litigation Practice Group, helped develop an innovative STEM pipeline scholarship program that has garnered support from the Clinton Global Initiative and the Dr. P. Phillips Foundation.

The Chief Justice's Law Firm Commendation Award is generally presented to one law firm each year for its outstanding efforts in support of equal justice and pro bono legal services. Akerman was selected for the award by a Supreme Court committee after its review of nominations from across the state. The firm will be honored at the annual Pro Bono Service Awards ceremony on January 29 at the Supreme Court of Florida by Chief Justice Jorge Labarga.

This recognition comes only weeks after Akerman was honored by the Florida Guardian ad Litem Program with the "Community Advocate of the Year" award in the 13th Judicial Circuit, which recognizes one individual or organization that has made significant contributions to promote volunteer advocacy for foster care children. Akerman was selected based on the impact achieved through its firm-wide "Give Back" campaign.

About Akerman LLP

Akerman LLP is a leading transactions and trial law firm known for its core strengths in middle market M&A, within the financial services and real estate industries, and for a diverse Latin America practice. With more than 600 lawyers and government affairs professionals and a network of 20 offices, it is ranked among the top 100 law firms in the United States by *The National Law Journal* NLJ 350 (2014). Akerman also is ranked among the top 50 law firms for diversity in *The American Lawyer's* Diversity Scorecard (2014).