

Press Release

Akerman Becomes First Law Firm to Partner Nationally with CASA for Children; Supports Foster Youth

May 21, 2014

Firm Launches Inaugural 'Give Back' Campaign to Promote Volunteer Child Advocacy and Pro Bono Service Throughout U.S.

Related People

Andrew M. Smulian

Akerman LLP, a top 100 U.S. law firm serving clients across the Americas, intensified its philanthropic commitment to its many communities with the first Akerman "Give Back" campaign this month. The initiative is a collective effort by firm lawyers and staff to support common organizations that share the firm's philanthropic focus on education and youth development.

For the inaugural campaign, launched during National Foster Care Month, the firm worked alongside the National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association and its local CASA and guardian ad litem (GAL) programs to promote volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children in the foster care system. As the first law firm to partner nationally with CASA, hundreds of Akerman lawyers and staff across the country collectively pledged more than 14,000 volunteer hours and raised more than \$100,000, with the pledged time and contributions having the potential to improve the lives of more than 200 foster children. Their efforts complement those across the firm who for years have contributed countless hours

toward pro bono legal service and fundraising for underprivileged children and their families.

“At Akerman, we recognize that we have a responsibility to serve as allies to the community. We have a long history of doing good and giving back, and we have pledged to achieve even greater impact by focusing on initiatives that address the fundamental needs of at-risk youth in underserved communities,” said Andrew Smulian, Akerman Chairman and CEO. “The launch of Akerman’s ‘Give Back’ campaign is an important step in aligning our charitable efforts and will intensify our community engagement, volunteerism and pro bono service. The success of our first national collaborative philanthropic effort is a testament to our people and our genuine passion for making a difference in our communities.”

Community Impact Teams comprised of Akerman lawyers and staff were formed across the firm’s 20 offices to lead Akerman’s “Give Back” activities, raising donations, recruiting volunteers and increasing awareness of the CASA/GAL mission. Their efforts were inspired by the resilience of the more than 600,000 children in the overburdened foster care system — almost a third lack an advocate to stand for them and ensure the services and support they need to succeed, including a complete education. Studies demonstrate a child with a CASA volunteer is more likely to do better in school. Only 54 percent of youth in foster care earn a high school diploma and only 2 percent earn a bachelor’s degree or higher.

To support the firm’s increased focus on community volunteerism, Akerman also announced it will provide its regular, full-time staff the equivalent of two additional paid days off during the year for the purpose of volunteering their time to an organization or activity supported by the firm’s philanthropic initiative.

“We at CASA for Children are incredibly grateful for all of Akerman’s contributions,” said Michael Piraino, National CASA Association CEO. “Only by working with dedicated partners like Akerman can we achieve our goal of finding an advocate for every child in the foster care system. Akerman’s pledges will bring a great deal of hope to many neglected and abused children, and help them access the support and services they need to lead fulfilling and productive lives.”

In partnership with charitable organizations, clients and other community stakeholders, Akerman will continue to support youth nationwide, by preserving the learning resources they need to thrive, championing the work of educators and breaking down barriers to success.

“It is our responsibility as lawyers to advocate justice for those without a voice,” said Smulian. “Together we can and will do better for these kids.”

Akerman lawyers have a long standing tradition of providing pro bono legal services to disadvantaged youth and others in the community. Partner Karen Meyer Buesing is among those most recently recognized for her devotion to pro bono work. She was honored earlier this year with Florida’s highest distinction for pro bono service, The Florida Bar’s Tobias Simon Pro Bono Service Award, for her unwavering commitment to assist homeless youth.

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 (2013). Akerman also is ranked among the top 50 law firms for diversity in *The American Lawyer’s Diversity*

Scorecard (2013). More information can be found at akerman.com or twitter.com/akerman_law.

About National CASA

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) for Children is a network of 933 community-based programs that recruit, train and support citizen-volunteers to advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children in courtrooms and communities. The only program of its kind, CASA volunteers are empowered by the courts to provide children with one-on-one advocacy. CASA volunteers see their assigned children regularly and interview all the adults who impact their lives. Volunteer advocates offer judges the critical information they need to ensure each child's rights and needs are being attended to while in foster care, staying with the child until she is placed in a loving permanent home. For many abused children, their CASA volunteer is the only constant adult presence in their lives. More information can be found at CASAforChildren.org.