

## Press Release

# Akerman Drives STEM Pipeline Program with Community Partners

August 21, 2014

Firm Joins Forces with United Negro College Fund, Sanford-Burnham Medical Research Institute to Increase Opportunities for Minority Youth

In partnership with the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) and Sanford-Burnham Medical Research Institute, Akerman LLP, a top 100 U.S. law firm serving clients across the Americas, today announced the continued success and expansion of UNCF's STEM Pipeline Program, aimed at increasing opportunities and presence for minorities in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) education and professional fields. Nearing the second year anniversary of the program, Akerman, along with UNCF, Sanford-Burnham, Fifth/Third Bank and Central Florida Medical Society, held a luncheon on August 12 at the Stanford-Burnham Medical Research Institute in Orlando to reunite donors and sponsors, and Central Florida's educational, political and business leaders. The group celebrated Kirk McCall's experience and achievements as the first-ever recipient of the UNCF STEM Pipeline Scholarship and intern at Sanford-Burnham.

As chair of UNCF's Scholarship Committee, [Megan DeVault](#), a partner in the Litigation Practice Group in Akerman's Orlando office, helped develop this comprehensive, collaborative initiative. Through her

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efforts with UNCF and Stanford-Burnham, the initiative has garnered more than \$100,000 in financial commitments, including donations from the Dr. P. Phillips Foundation. The latter provided seed money to help facilitate training and education of middle school students in the importance of STEM — curriculum that will be coordinated by the Orlando Science Center. Because of her efforts, DeVault was awarded the 2012 Champion of Education Award from the United Negro College Fund, and the Akerman STEM initiative has been consecutively featured at UNCF's annual Governor's Luncheon. In 2013, the innovative program was also recognized by the Clinton Global Initiative and was approved as a new commitment to action.

“Akerman's involvement in the UNCF's STEM Pipeline Program is part of the firm's long-standing commitment to support education and youth development programs nationwide,” said DeVault. “We are thrilled to work with UNCF and Sanford-Burnham and develop an innovative program that offers a pathway for minority students pursuing STEM careers and provides the learning resources they need to thrive. It is incumbent on us as professionals to think outside the box and challenge those in our industry to put diversity issues front and center, while at the same time addressing the paradigm shift in legal practice which will make lawyers more dependent on STEM education.”

The STEM Program is a product of collaboration at all levels in the community. From its inception, Akerman has worked alongside non-profit organizations, such as UNCF, and a leader in the medical research industry, Sanford-Burnham, to craft a unique program that offers professional and educational guidance, financial support and opportunity for minority students to successfully pursue STEM careers. The program is designed to utilize the significant economic and industry growth in STEM fields in Central Florida and beyond to cultivate a deep, diverse educational pipeline for

STEM professions — including highly desired and sought after intellectual property lawyers.

The first scholarship under the program was awarded in summer 2012 to McCall, who is now a rising junior at Xavier University in New Orleans, La., studying Biology/Pre-Med and minoring in Chemistry and Music. He recently completed his second internship rotation at Sanford-Burnham, learning and working under Dr. Layton Smith, assistant professor at Sanford-Burnham's Diabetes and Obesity Center in Lake Nona's lab, and has been conducting a heart failure study involving apelin, a protein that could have potential applications in common cardiovascular and metabolic problems such as high blood pressure and diabetes. The hands-on experience has been an advantage over typical college labwork, because it allows him more freedom and autonomy to work on experiments and present data on a regular basis.

"It's been an invaluable experience for me to gain first-hand, relevant research within the medical field for the first two years of my college experience," said McCall. "The relevance of the studies we're doing at Sanford-Burnham has definitely increased my academic and industry knowledge, while helping me make decisions of what I want to do going further. It's definitely valuable to be here."

### **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).

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