

Press Release

Akerman Partner David Bayne Leads Effort to Unify Connecticut CASA as its Board President

July 28, 2021

Top 100 U.S. law firm Akerman LLP is proud to announce that litigation partner David Bayne has aided the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) movement in the state of Connecticut to unify three separate CASA organizations in Connecticut into a single Connecticut CASA. The new entity builds on the progress of the original Connecticut CASA Association and two local CASA programs, CASA of Southern Connecticut and CASA of Northern Connecticut. The newly unified Connecticut CASA began operations on July 1 with the hiring of the former Southern Connecticut CASA Executive Director Josiah Brown as Connecticut CASA's new Executive Director.

Based in New Haven, the new Connecticut CASA has an 18-member Board of Directors consisting of Board members from all three original CASA organizations. The Connecticut CASA Board is a diverse group of respected professionals and persons dedicated to child advocacy from around the State of Connecticut. At its first Board meeting in May 2021, Bayne was unanimously elected to continue to lead Connecticut CASA as Board President of the newly reorganized entity and was thanked for his service in bringing these three organizations under one roof to serve children in need throughout the entire state.

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Connecticut CASA will recruit, prepare, and support CASA volunteers for children who have experienced abuse or neglect in their homes. Connecticut CASA partners with the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF), the judges of Connecticut's Superior Court for Juvenile Matters, Connecticut's legal community and other child welfare advocates to connect CASA volunteers with children in need of trained advocates to assist DCF and the Juvenile Matters Courts in ensuring that these children receive the attention and services that they need. Connecticut CASA is part of the National CASA/GAL Association for Children network with more than 96,000 volunteers across 49 states.

“In 2018, Connecticut was one of two states in the country without a statewide CASA organization. Connecticut CASA started from nothing and began building a strong state organization and two new local programs in New Haven and New Britain. All three organizations were on their way to establishing themselves when COVID-19 disrupted everything. Yet rather than wait out the pandemic, we viewed it as an opportunity to reimagine the CASA movement in Connecticut and then set to work executing on that vision by unifying three diverse organizations and creating one full-service statewide organization. The goal is to create efficiency in the provision of services to children in need and to unify the CASA voice within the State. As Connecticut has emerged from the pandemic, Connecticut CASA has arisen with a renewed dedication and stronger voice for child advocacy throughout the state. We are very excited about what we have accomplished to date and even more excited about the growth we anticipate in the years to come,” said David Bayne, President of the Connecticut CASA Board of directors.

Bayne joined the inaugural Board of Directors of the Connecticut CASA in May of 2019, when its main focus was raising awareness of CASA services among policymakers and the public, overseeing training quality, branding and marketing of the CASA

program, and managing the relationship with the National CASA/GAL Association. In January 2020, Bayne was elected as President of the Board, and shortly thereafter, took on the challenge of advancing the organization, despite the paralyzing effects COVID-19 across the state and court systems. In the spring of 2021, an agreement was reached to restructure Connecticut CASA into a single state-wide direct service provider and fold the operations of CASA of Northern Connecticut and CASA of Southern Connecticut into Connecticut CASA.

“We are very grateful for Akerman LLP’s support of the CASA/GAL network and the children and youth served across the country. Through generous support of the Akerman Academic Excellence Scholarship and through support provided to local CASA/GAL programs in cities with Akerman offices, Akerman truly makes an indelible impact. Individuals who work for Akerman often share their time and talents in other ways as well, by serving as CASA/GAL volunteers, pro bono attorneys and members of state and local boards of directors.

David has exemplified his commitment to the children and youth of his home state of Connecticut and the CASA program by providing strong leadership to the Connecticut CASA Association during the time of their merger. David’s strategic thinking, relationship building and ability to keep his eyes on positive outcomes for children and youth drove the best result with the least disruption to program services. We are deeply grateful for David’s leadership and commitment which helped Connecticut CASA arrive at the best structure for future success,” said Tara Lisa Perry, Chief Executive Officer of the National CASA/GAL Association for Children.

Beth Zafonte, chair of the Akerman Philanthropic Initiative said, “David recognized there was a strong need in Connecticut to formalize a new structure in order to better serve the state’s foster youth. David, being David, couldn’t turn away after seeing the

glaring need to find a solution. David's leadership talents, professional skills and grit were just what was needed to accomplish the successful unification of the various groups in the state to be one in service to foster youth under the CASA national umbrella. We are proud of his example and this furtherance of Akerman's relationship with the CASA movement."

Over the past several years, Akerman has developed a strong partnership with CASA and Guardian ad Litem programs across the United States, providing thousands of volunteer and pro bono hours and pledging \$1 million in academic scholarships in support of the National CASA/GAL Association's mission to support children who have experienced abuse and neglect.

About Akerman

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