

# PUBLICATION

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## Baker Donelson's Ongoing Commitment to Underserved Populations

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**Baker Donelson is deeply committed to providing pro bono legal services to underserved and marginalized communities. Within the past five years, our attorneys have contributed nearly 85,000 hours of pro bono legal services, which represents a value of more than \$33 million in legal fees. Additionally, we are proud to have led the legal industry by being one of the first law firms in the Southeast to create a Pro Bono Committee and designate a full-time Pro Bono Shareholder. To further our goals, we have designated Pro Bono Committee Office Chairs in most of our offices. The chairs focus on addressing local needs and coordinate with the Firm's Pro Bono Shareholder for global pro bono initiatives. This strategic framework ensures that we are well-suited to address a broad spectrum of needs across our footprint and beyond.**

I'm proud to share with you some of our Firm's recent pro bono contributions. Over the past year, Baker Donelson attorneys provided nearly 1,200 hours of pro bono services to issues affecting the homeless population.

These services include our contribution to the 2020 State Index on Youth Homelessness, a report from the National Homelessness Law Center and True Colors United. The report evaluates all 50 states as well as the District of Columbia on their individual efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness. The Index measures approximately 60 different factors gauging how states protect, or fail to protect, youth from becoming part of the 4.2 million homeless youth in the United States. Baker Donelson's involvement included the work of 15 attorneys, three summer associates and four pro bono fellows, who spent a cumulative total of nearly 500 hours researching how each state fell within the criteria set by the Law Center. Baker Donelson's work was overseen by Pro Bono Shareholder Samuel T. Bowman, Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer Mark A. Baugh, and Noah Kressler, chair of Baker Donelson's LGBTQ+ resource group BakerPride.

Among the factors evaluated were whether states have runaway and homeless youth policies, recognize emancipation, and maintain transitional planning for children exiting the juvenile justice system. Other factors focused on whether the states define the terms "gender" or "sex" in the effort to address the large population of LGBTQ+ youth who become homeless due to family abandonment. An analysis of these factors allows communities and policymakers to better understand how to best serve a vulnerable population.

As part of the Firm's commitment to assisting the homeless population, Baker Donelson attorneys also volunteer with the Homeless Experience Legal Protection (H.E.L.P.) program, an organization dedicated to assisting the homeless population with their legal needs, such as securing housing, finding a job, and obtaining public benefits. Several of our offices have founded local H.E.L.P. chapters, and we collaborate with many in our legal communities, including in-house counsel and local judges, in these efforts. Recently, attorneys in our Nashville office worked with local judges, the district attorney, the public defender, and many others in government and the nonprofit sector to establish a Homeless Court, which routes members of the homeless population to social programs and resources and away from overly burdensome fines and incarceration.

### Partnering with Clients

We routinely invite in-house legal departments and their staffs to partner with us on pro bono legal projects, ranging from helping legal departments form and launch their own internal pro bono programs to co-hosting virtual or walk-in clinics. By joining forces with Baker Donelson to help those in our communities who cannot afford an attorney, corporate counsel can serve as a critical resource for qualified legal advice without the administrative obligations. We arrange the details, including scheduling, providing pre-training sessions that are often accredited for CLE, liaising with local legal aid organizations, facilitating a team approach, and even catering the events.

For legal departments interested in contributing their services to a specific cause, Baker Donelson can vet opportunities and provide the infrastructure and resources to make the goal a reality. One example includes our work with a New Orleans-based energy company on a joint drivers' license suspension project spanning Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. Attorneys from Baker Donelson and the client served as co-leads on the project. The goal was to reform legislation so that people who have lost their licenses due to overly burdensome fees can keep them, as being unlicensed can significantly impact an individual's ability to work.

Additionally, we welcome the opportunity to collaborate with in-house counsel to devote additional pro bono services to and expand attorney participation with organizations that support minorities and the LGBTQ+ community, including:

- Law Firm Antiracism Alliance (LFAA);
- Leadership Council on Legal Diversity (LCLD);
- ABA Racial Equity in the Justice System;
- Stonewall Bar Associations; and
- ABA Task Force on Building Public Trust.

For more information about partnership opportunities, please contact [Samuel T. Bowman](#), Pro Bono Shareholder, at 615.726.5701 or [sbowman@bakerdonelson.com](mailto:sbowman@bakerdonelson.com).