

# PRESS RELEASE

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## Firm Launches Pro Bono Legal Clinic for Homeless in Nashville

October 29, 2008

(Nashville, TN/October 29, 2008) Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz, PC, is pleased to announce that it will lead the launch of the Homeless Experience Legal Protection (HELP) program in Nashville. The project, which began in New Orleans and is expanding to a number of other cities, provides a weekly legal clinic offering pro bono advice and representation for homeless individuals.

HELP first began in New Orleans in May 2004 as the brainchild of U.S. District Court Judge Jay Zainey, and that city now has more than 450 attorneys and notaries who volunteer. Baker Donelson, one of the original firms to participate, currently has about a dozen volunteer attorneys in New Orleans, and Judge Zainey approached the Firm about expanding the program in other cities, including Nashville.

"I am very proud of the members of our honorable profession who are sharing their God-given talents with the least fortunate in our communities," said Judge Zainey. HELP programs are now in several cities, including Baton Rouge, Lafayette and Shreveport, Louisiana; New York City; Chicago; Savannah, Georgia; Columbia, South Carolina and more, with plans to establish programs in other cities this year.

To launch the Nashville branch of the program, Baker Donelson will provide volunteer attorneys to staff the clinic in its first month of operation, and will help to recruit additional volunteers to continue staffing the clinic in future months. The first volunteer recruitment meeting will be held on Thursday, October 30, at the Firm's Nashville office at 211 Commerce Street, Suite 1000, beginning at 5:00 p.m.

"The Nashville program offers a much-needed resource for those who don't otherwise have access to legal services," said Tonya Grindon, a shareholder and Pro Bono Coordinator for the Firm's Nashville office. Marnee Baker, Pro Bono Co-Coordinator in the Nashville office, adds "Any lawyer can help, no matter what area of practice or level of experience. We welcome lawyers from corporate law departments, law firms, solo practitioners and governmental entities to give back to their community and volunteer their skills."

"Our experience in other cities is that most problems the clients bring to us are pretty simple for an attorney to resolve, but have presented huge obstacles for the individuals in terms of improving their lives. This program will be one of the very few paths that the homeless in Birmingham have for legal advice, and it has the advantage of bringing that advice to the clients instead of requiring them to know how to seek it out," said Baker Donelson's Pro Bono Shareholder Lisa Borden, who directs the Firm's provision of free legal services to the disadvantaged. "But HELP goes way beyond providing legal services. The individuals served through this program are given a sense of belonging in a society that mostly ignores and fears them, and we are privileged to be able to help provide that opportunity."

The Nashville HELP program will be held each Wednesday morning at Room In The Inn/Campus for Human Development, located at 532 8th Avenue South. The clinics are expected to begin in December. "Room In The Inn is excited to partner with project HELP in offering legal resources to individuals who struggle with homelessness," said Rachel Hester, executive director of Room In The Inn. "The ministry of Room In The Inn has long been a way for volunteers to offer their gifts and talents in service to the homeless, and HELP is an extension of this. People who are homeless have difficulty in obtaining legal services, and HELP will remove

many barriers that stand in the way of them receiving counsel. We are grateful to Judge Zainey for sharing his vision with our city."

Baker Donelson recently launched this program in Atlanta, Georgia, and Birmingham Alabama, and is currently working with Judge Zainey on further expansions of the HELP program in Memphis. According to Jonathan Cole, Chair of Baker Donelson's Pro Bono Committee and a shareholder in the Nashville office, "Baker Donelson is both excited and honored to have the opportunity to help Judge Zainey in his efforts to provide needed legal services to homeless individuals. When you consider that a problem that is very simple for a lawyer to resolve may be what is standing between the homeless person and a job or housing, you begin to realize just how important a project like HELP is, not just for the homeless clients, but for the communities in which they live."