

PRESS RELEASE

Baker Donelson Recognizes 2024 Pro Bono Attorneys of the Year

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Baker Donelson has announced its annual Pro Bono Attorneys of the Year Awards, recognizing eight attorneys throughout the Firm for their pro bono work.

Baker Donelson's Firmwide Pro Bono Award is presented each year to an attorney who has made a significant pro bono commitment either in their respective community or globally. [Kat Statman](#) was named the Firmwide 2024 Baker Donelson Pro Bono Attorney of the Year in recognition of his significant impact nationwide through his involvement with the National Homelessness Law Center (NHLC) in its annual 50-state index of laws and regulations that address youth homelessness. Baker Donelson has supported the NHLC in this project since 2019, and Mr. Statman has served as the Firm's team supervisor on this project for the last several years. This role is a considerable undertaking that encompasses managing numerous associates and summer associates as well as ensuring all metrics are met and submitted on time. Under Mr. Statman's leadership, the Firm furthered its previous success in completing this project for the NHLC, an effort that was recognized when the NHLC named Baker Donelson its 2023 Pro Bono Law Firm of the Year.

[Jonathan Cole](#), who chairs Baker Donelson's pro bono program, said, "Kat's work exemplifies the ideals and commitment to service that these awards are designed to recognize. He and all of our honorees committed their talents and energy to serving the underserved, whether through specific matters rendering aid to individuals or ongoing efforts supporting other organizations. In doing so they not only upheld Baker Donelson's tenured reputation as a leader in pro bono service, but they also have made a real and lasting impact in our communities."

Baker Donelson also recognized attorneys in many of its individual offices for their pro bono efforts.

- [Robert N. Johnson](#), Atlanta Pro Bono Attorney of the Year: Mr. Johnson was recognized for his leadership in assisting in the creation and development of a much-needed non-profit school in the Atlanta community. Established in 2018, the International Charter Academy of Georgia (ICAGeorgia) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation organized for the purpose of operating Georgia's first public English-Japanese dual language immersion charter school for elementary students from kindergarten through fifth grade. Mr. Johnson was instrumental in meeting the legal needs to start ICAGeorgia, then joined the newly established board of directors with chief governance officer responsibilities, and served in that capacity for six years, including as chairman of the board for the past four years.
- [Lucas L. Lopez](#), Birmingham Pro Bono Attorney of the Year: Mr. Lopez was recognized for his pro bono work with two Alabama non-profits. He was integral in the formation of the Vestavia Hills Arts Council (VHAC) and provided extensive related legal support for the non-profit, including securing VHAC's Employment Identification Number from the Internal Revenue Service and drafting governance documents necessary to receive 501(c)(3) status. He also assisted in securing 501(c)(3) status for Hub in the Hills, Inc., an Alabama non-profit corporation, as part of their mission to repurpose the former Vestavia Hills Central Elementary into a "hub" for educational non-profits. Mr. Lopez was also part of a team of Baker Donelson attorneys who assisted a client from Afghanistan in applying for asylum.

- **Karen Blake**, Fort Lauderdale Pro Bono Attorney of the Year: Ms. Blake, who received this same honor in 2023, was once again recognized for her work with the Uniting for Ukraine Program, which provides a pathway for Ukrainian citizens and their immediate family members to come into the U.S. on a temporary basis. Ms. Blake assisted a family from Kharkiv, including an eight-year-old boy, in securing the necessary Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to help them stay in the U.S. Her efforts led to the family settling in Massachusetts, where the young boy, who had been having trouble adapting, was able to be placed in a new school attended by other Ukrainian refugees.
- **Leslie Bounds**, Jackson Pro Bono Attorney of the Year: Ms. Bounds' pro bono work has included serving as Chancellor for the Mississippi Conference of the United Methodist Church – where she advises the bishop and cabinet on legal matters – and serving as the treasurer of Bethlehem Center, a community center in one of the poorest areas of Jackson with a primary focus of serving as a daycare for underprivileged children. As the Jackson Office Pro Bono chair, Ms. Bounds has also been responsible for staffing several legal clinics at Stewpot, where the disadvantaged and homeless receive food, shelter, clothing, and care. She has also served at several Mississippi Volunteer Legal Project expungement clinics.
- **R. Andrew Hutchinson**, Johnson City Pro Bono Attorney of the Year: Mr. Hutchinson was honored for his ongoing efforts to help people through difficult housing and real property issues and with other legal challenges commonly experienced by seniors and people whose family members have disabilities. His work has included conservatorships, grant applications for home improvements, and basic estate planning. Mr. Hutchinson, who has twice been recognized for his service with Legal Aid of East Tennessee's Pro Bono Attorney of the Year award, also contributes to the ABA Free Legal Answers programs in Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, and West Virginia.
- **Thomas J. Aumann**, Nashville Pro Bono Attorney of the Year: Mr. Aumann was recognized for his efforts as part of a team of Baker Donelson attorneys who secured asylum for a client from Afghanistan. The client, an English speaker, and accomplished musician, worked as a muralist and mural coordinator for a company that promotes ideals such as democracy and women's rights by creating murals in public areas. When the Taliban took over the Afghan government and implemented its strict, oppressive rule, the client feared he would be persecuted, and his life put in danger due to his beliefs and activities. After the client fled Afghanistan and was placed in Nashville, Mr. Aumann and his team helped the client complete his I-589 asylum application and prepare him for his asylum interview, leading to the client being granted asylum.
- **Benjamin West Janke**, New Orleans Pro Bono Attorney of the Year: Mr. Janke was recognized for his long-time involvement with the Pro Bono Project in New Orleans, which provides free legal services to underserved members of the community. Throughout his entire career, Mr. Janke has dedicated time and talent to address needs in the area of family law, including regularly handling family law matters through the Pro Bono Project, hosting several CLE panels on family law, and overseeing dozens of pro bono cases in the New Orleans office.

Through its commitment to **pro bono representation**, Baker Donelson provides legal services to groups and individuals whose resources are limited. The Firm's efforts include work on a wide range of matters, such as advocating for the homeless and organizations that serve the homeless, providing corporate legal services to non-profit organizations, and collaborating with our clients to address particular community needs. Baker Donelson has been instrumental in endeavors such as expanding the Homeless Experience Legal Protection (H.E.L.P) program across the Southeast; creating courts dedicated to handling minor legal matters common among the homeless; assisting persons of limited means with obtaining driver's licenses, an essential need

when reintegrating into society; and spearheading and organizing volunteer lawyer programs across Baker Donelson's footprint.

Baker Donelson has helped reshape the legal industry by being one of the first law firms in the Southeast to create a Pro Bono Committee and designate a pro bono shareholder. Additionally, Baker Donelson designates Pro Bono Committee office chairs in most of its 23 offices. These chairs are best suited to address local needs while coordinating with the Firm's pro bono shareholder for global pro bono initiatives. This structure ensures Baker Donelson is well-suited to further its goal of addressing broad spectrum needs across the Firm's markets and beyond.