

PRESS RELEASE

Baker Donelson Launches Pro Bono Legal Clinic for Homeless

October 6, 2008

(Birmingham, AL/October 6, 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 Birmingham. 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 Birmingham. "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 Birmingham 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 9, at the Firm's Birmingham office at 420 20th Street North on the 17th floor beginning at 5:00 p.m. Among those attending the recruitment meeting are American Bar Association President Tommy Wells and U.S. District Judge Sharon Blackburn, chief judge in the Northern District of Alabama.

Law students from the Cumberland School of Law in Birmingham will also be involved in HELP. Cumberland's Dean, John Carroll, has made public service a priority since he became dean in June 2001. "This project responds to the highest calling of our profession, and I am incredibly excited about this opportunity for our students to learn and to make a difference in people's lives," said Dean Carroll. According to Jennifer Benedict, a third-year law student at Cumberland who is involved in assisting Baker Donelson with the launch of the HELP program, "This is a great opportunity for law students to take an active role in providing a necessary service for the community while gaining valuable experience."

"The Birmingham HELP program offers a much-needed resource for those who don't otherwise have access to legal services," said Lisa Borden, Baker Donelson's Pro Bono Shareholder and an attorney in the Firm's Birmingham office. "Any lawyer can help, no matter what specialty area of practice or background. We welcome lawyers from corporate law departments and law firms, as well as solo practitioners, to help provide this pro bono support."

"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 Ms. Borden. "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 Birmingham HELP program will be held each Wednesday afternoon at The Old Firehouse Shelter at 1501 Third Avenue North, and is expected to open in late October. "We're excited about the start of the Birmingham HELP program," states Steve Freeman, director of The Old Firehouse Shelter. "So many of the homeless are kept in their situation because of simple legal issues. Resolving these issues will get people off the street, out of shelters and back with their families. We are proud to be a part of this wonderful program."

Baker Donelson recently launched this program in Atlanta, Georgia, and is currently working with Judge Zainey on further expansions of the HELP program in Memphis and Nashville. Ms. Borden, who directs the Firm's provision of free legal services to the disadvantaged, said "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."