

# PRESS RELEASE

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## TBA Recognizes Baker Donelson for Pro Bono Work

**March 4, 2014**

NASHVILLE, March 4, 2014 — The Knoxville office of Baker Donelson was recognized for its commitment to providing free legal services at the Eighth Annual Corporate Counsel Pro Bono Initiative Gala this past Saturday in Nashville.

The firm was presented with the Corporate Counsel Pro Bono Law Firm Award for two programs it supports in collaboration with Legal Aid of East Tennessee (LAET), whose mission is to represent those who are unable to afford civil legal assistance. In recognizing the firm, TBA President Cindy Wyrick said "Baker Donelson represents the highest level of commitment to pro bono service and serves as an example to other firms about how to provide life-changing pro bono assistance to those most in need."

Under the first program – the Pillar Law Firm Program – Baker Donelson lawyers volunteer to represent legal aid clients seeking assistance with conservatorships. Many of these clients are parents of severely disabled children who have just turned 18, necessitating a court order for the parent to continue directing their child's medical care and make other decisions about the child's long-term well-being. Others are children of aging parents facing the difficult situation of becoming their parents' caretaker.

In her nomination of the firm, LAET Pro Bono Coordinator Terry Woods noted "The process of becoming a conservator can evoke strong emotional responses and lawyers representing these clients must maintain an often-difficult balance between expressing compassion and professional objectivity. Baker Donelson [attorneys have] exemplified both traits with extraordinary success, handling three dozen cases since launching the project."

The Pillar Law Firm Program is an initiative supported by the TBA Access to Justice Committee and the Supreme Court's Access to Justice Commission. It is being implemented across the state as a way to pair firms with expertise in certain areas of the law with those unable to afford legal assistance. The Knoxville office of Baker Donelson was one of the first in the state to join the effort.

Under the second program, Baker Donelson lawyers provide legal assistance to homeless men, women and children seeking shelter at the Knox Area Rescue Ministries. Project H.E.L.P. (Homeless Experience Legal Protection), provides legal assistance with a wide variety of issues, including obtaining birth certificates, applying for food stamps and other public benefits, securing public housing, expunging criminal records, avoiding wage garnishments, and arranging visitation with and seeking custody of children. Baker Donelson partners with LAET and the University of Tennessee College of Law to bring these services to the most vulnerable in the community.

The Corporate Counsel Gala, which includes a dinner and ceremony, is part of the Corporate Counsel Pro Bono Initiative – a partnership between the TBA and the Association of Corporate Counsel that encourages and supports pro bono activities by lawyers serving as in-house and corporate counsel in the state. Since its beginning, the initiative has raised nearly \$425,000 to help bring legal services to the poor. This year, the gala raised over \$55,000 to support pro bono activities in the state. The initiative also recognizes a law firm and a corporate legal office each year that demonstrate extraordinary commitment to access to justice ideals, pro bono service and the Corporate Counsel Covenant of Service.

This year's event featured remarks by Tennessee Supreme Court Chief Justice Gary Wade, Corporate Counsel Bono Initiative Co-Chairs Andy Branham and Jim Barry, TBA Access to Justice Committee Chair Alex MacKay, Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services Executive Director Ann Pruitt and TBA President Cindy Wyrick. Bruce Ives, deputy general counsel for Hewlett-Packard, gave the keynote address.

### **About Legal Aid of East Tennessee**

Legal Aid of East Tennessee's mission is to ensure justice for elderly, abused, and low-income people by providing a broad scope of civil legal assistance and advocacy. LAET serves eligible persons in 26 counties through offices in Chattanooga, Knoxville, Johnson City, Maryville, and Morristown.

### **About the Tennessee Bar Association**

The Tennessee Bar Association (TBA) is the largest professional association in Tennessee with more than 12,000 members. Founded in 1881, the TBA provides opportunities for continuing legal education, professional development and public service. The TBA's dedication to serving the state's legal community is evidenced by its membership roll, which represents the entire spectrum of legal practice: plaintiff and defense lawyers, corporate counsel, judges, prosecutors, public defenders, government lawyers and legal services attorneys.