

PRESS RELEASE

Baker Donelson Provides Pro Bono Assistance for 2020 State Index on Youth Homelessness

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Baker Donelson provided pro bono support that was integral to the recently published 2020 State Index on Youth Homelessness, a report from the National Homelessness Law Center (the Law Center) and True Colors United that evaluates all 50 states and the District of Columbia on their efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness.

The Index takes into account approximately 60 different factors illustrative of how individual states protect, or fail to protect, youth from ending up as 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 for review by the Law Center.

Among the factors considered 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 experience homelessness due to their families disowning them. The analysis of these factors shows how states can better support the homeless youth population.

"Even in a year without global catastrophe, young people experiencing homelessness face persistent barriers to shelter, health care, and life sustaining services. Disasters like COVID-19 exacerbate those inequities and make our work that much more critical," said Brandy Ryan, Staff Attorney at the Law Center and co-author of the Index. "We are so grateful to the pro bono team at Baker Donelson. With their help, we are clearly showing states how their efforts on youth homelessness are working and where they can improve."

Baker Donelson's work on the project was overseen by Pro Bono Shareholder [Samuel T. Bowman](#), Chief Diversity Officer [Mark A. Baugh](#), and [Noah Kressler](#), chair of Baker Donelson's LGBTQ resource group BakerPride.

The full Index is available at <https://youthstateindex.com>.

The National Homelessness Law Center (the Law Center), formerly known as the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, is the only national organization dedicated solely to using the power of the law to prevent and end homelessness. With the support of a large network of pro bono lawyers, the Law Center addresses the immediate and long-term needs of people who are homeless or at risk through outreach and training, advocacy, impact litigation, and public education.

True Colors United implements innovative solutions to youth homelessness that focus on the unique experiences of LGBTQ young people. True Colors United believes that youth homelessness is a community issue. Real change can happen when people come together with a shared vision. More information about True Colors United and access to research publications such as this report are available at truecolorsunited.org.

Through its commitment to [pro bono representation](#), Baker Donelson provides legal services to groups and individuals whose resources are limited. For decades, the Firm's attorneys have provided a variety of counsel to many underserved populations that have had no options for legal representation. Baker Donelson'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, collaborating with our clients to address particular community needs, and much more. The Firm has been instrumental in efforts such as expanding the Homeless Experience Legal Protection (HELP) 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 in helping these individuals reintegrate into society; and spearheading and organizing volunteer lawyer programs across Baker Donelson's footprint.

Baker Donelson has led the way in 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 its commitment to pro bono, Baker Donelson also designates Pro Bono Committee Office Chairs in most of its 21 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 footprint and beyond.