

The Bridge to Law School Program, A Partner of Stearns Weaver Miller, honored with 2023 Tallahassee Women Lawyers Diversity & Inclusion Leadership Award

Tallahassee, FL – June 15, 2023 – Stearns Weaver Miller is proud to announce that The Bridge to Law School Program (“Program”) which is a partnership between Stearns Weaver Miller, the Florida State University College of Law, the William H. Stafford American Inn of Court, the Tallahassee Bar Association, and The Florida State University Center for Academic Retention and Enhancement (CARE) program has been selected as the recipient for the 2023 Tallahassee Women Lawyers Diversity & Inclusion Leadership Award.

The award recognizes those who display a leadership role in promoting Diversity and Inclusion within the workplace and/or community. It measures both the intensity of commitment and level of achievement of inclusion initiatives such as recruitment and retention efforts, research, multi-cultural programming, cultural competency, and community outreach activities. Through this award, TWL aims to “shine a light on good practices in our community and to inspire others to replicate successful initiatives.” The award was presented during a ceremony on Wednesday, June 14, 2023.

The Program is a new initiative that integrates academic preparation, mentoring, and professional development to demystify the law school application process, the law school experience, and the practice of law for first-generation college students. The Program was developed by Shareholders [Kelly O’Keefe](#) and [Melanie Leitman](#) who lead the firm’s Tallahassee clerkship program.

“Through participation in our firm’s internal Equity and Justice Project, which identified opportunities to achieve racial equity and social justice in the legal profession, Melanie and I saw the need to start earlier and build a ‘Bridge to Law School’ for the broader population,” said O’Keefe. “And really, even though this program is called ‘Bridge to Law School,’ the ultimate goal is to build a bridge to the legal profession.”

The Program officially launched in Spring 2023 and, in a few short months, has quickly gained momentum in the local Tallahassee community. The mentoring component is currently underway with 17 teams of three, each consisting of an undergraduate CARE student, a law student, and an attorney from our local legal community, that meet and communicate regularly. The first class had over 50 participants of whom 63% were women and 100% of the undergraduate mentees (CARE students) were first-generation college students.

There have also been several networking and engagement events including an FSU Law School tour, coffee meet and greets hosted at Stearns Weaver Miller, and a networking event hosted by TBA which sponsored free registrations for participating law students and CARE students to join local judges, lawyers, and legal professionals for an evening highlighting the importance of Diversity and Inclusion in the profession.

“With the help of this supportive network, mentees will learn how to translate their academic and professional experiences into a law school application portfolio and identify opportunities

that will not only make them more competitive applicants,” said Leitman, “but also posture these students for success in law school and in their careers.”

While the Program’s initial efforts will focus on undergraduate students, there are future plans to expand to engage students of all ages. Firm attorneys and staff currently tutor students at Bond Elementary School in Tallahassee.

The full Program is expected to be launched in fall of 2024. CARE students will ultimately apply for the program and, in addition to receiving mentoring, will participate in projects and classes designed to help them navigate the law school application process, the law school admissions test, law school, and the pursuit of a legal career. If you are interested in getting involved, please contact Kelly O’Keefe or Melanie Leitman.

Contact Kelly O’Keefe | 850-329-4893 | kokeefe@stearnsweaver.com
[View Bio](#) | [Download v-Card](#) | [Connect via LinkedIn](#)

Contact Melanie Leitman | 850-329-4846 | mleitman@stearnsweaver.com
[View Bio](#) | [Download v-Card](#) | [Connect via LinkedIn](#)

About Tallahassee Women Lawyers

Tallahassee Women Lawyers, an affiliate of Florida Association for Women Lawyers (FAWL), is an organization that provides leadership, a collective voice, and essential resources to advance women in the legal profession and advocates for the equality of women under the law. For more information, visit www.mytwl.org.

About Stearns Weaver Miller

Stearns Weaver Miller is a Florida-based law firm with more than 150 attorneys and offices in Miami, Coral Gables, Fort Lauderdale, Tampa and Tallahassee. For over 40 years, our multidisciplinary team of attorneys and professionals have worked collaboratively to help our clients understand and resolve complex legal issues and disputes. For more information, visit www.stearnsweaver.com.