

October 2, 2020

Superintendent Tim Wyrosdick  
Santa Rosa District Schools  
[wyrosdickt@santarosa.k12.fl.us](mailto:wyrosdickt@santarosa.k12.fl.us)

RE: Santa Rosa County School Board posting for School Board  
Attorney - Outside Counsel

Dear Superintendent Wyrosdick,

The law firm of Hand Arendall Harrison Sale LLC is grateful for the opportunity to submit this letter of interest and firm resume for review as your board seeks a new School Board Attorney.

Our attorneys are available to address any inquiries that you may have during your review of this response. Your primary points of contact are Heather K. Hudson, Member and Franklin R. Harrison, Florida Managing Member. Both can be reached at 304 Magnolia Avenue, Panama City, Florida 32401 or 850-769-3434. Their email addresses are [hhudson@handfirm.com](mailto:hhudson@handfirm.com) and [fharrison@handfirm.com](mailto:fharrison@handfirm.com).

### **Firm History and Qualifications**

Hand Arendall Harrison Sale ("HAHS") was established in 1941. HAHS is the result of a 2018 merger of Bay County's largest law firm, Harrison Sale McCloy Jackson & Moniz, Chartered, with one of Alabama's largest law firms, Hand Arendall LLC. The resulting firm has 87 attorneys with eight offices throughout Northwest Florida and Alabama.

We serve clients via our offices in the following cities (with dates established): Panama City (1984), Panama City Beach (2018), Destin (2012), Santa Rosa Beach (2014), Mobile (1941), Birmingham (1996), Athens (2005), and Fairhope (2007).

HAHS has the highest rating from Martindale-Hubbell, "AV Preeminent," which means that the firm has reached the highest level of

professional excellence and is recognized for the highest levels of skill and ethical integrity by their peers. The firm has extensive experience in school board representation.

Our Florida attorneys are all in good standing with the Florida Bar and no disciplinary action has been taken against them. Finally, thirty-five HAHS attorneys were recently listed in The Best Lawyers in America 2021 edition.

### **Experienced Education Lawyers**

Our firm has over forty years' experience representing a Florida public school board. The firm is uniquely qualified to meet your District's needs with two partners who are Florida Bar Board Certified Specialists in Education Law. Only 52 members of the Florida Bar have earned this distinction. Board certified lawyers are evaluated for professionalism and tested for expertise in their area of practice. Certification is the Florida Bar's highest level of evaluation of the competency and experience of attorneys in the 24 areas of law approved for certification by the Supreme Court of Florida.

Some clients that have engaged our team include:

- Alabama Community College System
- Athens City School Board
- Bay County School Board
- Okaloosa County School Board (served as special counsel in bid protests and personnel matters)

Following are some of the services we have assisted our clients with:

**Attendance at Public Meetings.** All HAHS local government attorneys appear and attend public meetings on behalf of our local government clients, and all are adept and experienced in handling commission, board, and public inquiries in a public setting.

**Special Education Services.** HAHS attorneys are knowledgeable on IDEA and Section 504 matters. Our team is well-equipped to provide counsel, as needed, in IEP meetings and throughout due process hearings that may occur.

**Public Finance.** HAHS attorneys have served as issuing counsel for almost one billion dollars in publicly financed bonds in Bay County alone, including over \$414 million for the Bay County School Board. In addition, HAHS lawyers are qualified as underwriters' counsel for public finance funding and HAHS has three lawyers named by the Best Lawyers in America in the area of Public Finance law.

**Litigation Support.** HAHS has a full service litigation department with more than 50 attorneys with litigation experience in federal and state court, administrative proceedings, and arbitration. Litigation services provided to other HAHS local government clients include defense of employment claims, defense of administrative challenges to land use orders, tort defense, and contract litigation. HAHS has a track record of success in these matters, including recently obtaining a six figure attorney fee award against the plaintiff and his lawyers on behalf of the Bay County School Board in a unfounded lawsuit alleging employment and constitutional violations.

**Sunshine and Public Records.** HAHS attorneys are knowledgeable on Florida sunshine and public records laws having advised many local government entities on such matters for decades. HAHS attorneys have also provided an annual seminar on public ethics, meetings, and records to public officials throughout Northwest Florida for the past several years. We provide this training to our clients' elected officials and staff free of charge.

### **Proposed Team**

We intend Heather K. Hudson to be the lead attorney for Santa Rosa School Board matters, with Franklin Harrison, Dion Moniz, Jennifer Comella and Hayward Dykes providing direct support as needed.

Heather is a Board Certified Specialist in Education Law with nine years' experience representing a Florida school board. Heather will work closely with the firm's Florida Managing Member, Franklin Harrison, who is also a Board Certified Specialist in Education Law and has been representing a Florida school board for forty-one years.

Other lawyers from our firm will be engaged based on the Board's needs. HAHS will always remain open to discuss the lead attorney assignment as needed to best meet the needs of the Board and HAHS.

All attorneys in HAHS Florida offices are in good standing with the Florida Bar. All attorneys listed below were admitted to the Florida Bar the year they received their Juris Doctorate (J.D.) as indicated in their respective biography. Additional information about all 87 HAHS attorneys is available on our website at [www.handfirm.com](http://www.handfirm.com).

It is our sincere hope that our team may have the opportunity to serve the School Board of Santa Rosa County. Please do not hesitate to reach out to any of us with your questions as you make this important decision.

Sincerely,



Heather K. Hudson

*For the Firm*

Enclosures: Attorney Biographies; References

**Heather Hudson**

*Education:*

J.D., 2011, Cum Laude, Walter F. George School of Law  
at Mercer University

B.A., 2007, Magna Cum Laude, University of West  
Florida

*Community and Professional Memberships:*

Florida School Board Attorneys Association, Director  
Council of School Attorneys of the National School  
Boards Association, Member

Education Law Association, Member

Junior League of Panama City, Sustainer

Elevate Bay Mentor

Bay County Bar Association

The Florida Bar

Admitted to Federal Bar of the Northern District of  
Florida

Admitted to United States Court of Appeals for the  
Eleventh Circuit

Admitted to Supreme Court of the United States



*About Heather:*

Heather Kennedy Hudson is a Member in the Panama City office. Her practice is focused on public education, probate, and estate law. Ms. Hudson is a Florida Bar Board Certified Specialist in Education Law.

Ms. Hudson earned her Juris Doctorate from the Walter F. George School of Law at Mercer University, where she graduated Cum Laude, received the Faculty Legal Writing Award, and served on law review. She earned her B.A. from the University of West Florida, where she graduated Magna Cum Laude and received the faculty award for Excellence in Legal Studies in 2006 and Outstanding Legal Studies Graduate in 2007.

Ms. Hudson is a member of The Florida Bar and the Federal Bar of the Northern District of Florida and is admitted to practice in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit and the Supreme Court of the United States. She also enjoys serving the community through her involvement with the Junior League of Panama City, her work with 14th Judicial Circuit First Saturday Legal Clinic, and her service as a mentor with Bay District Schools' Elevate Bay initiative.

**Franklin Harrison**

*Education:*

J.D., 1972, University of Florida

B.S., Business Administration, 1969, University of Florida

*Community and Professional Memberships:*

Past Chair of the Multi-State Bar Exam Policy Committee  
of the National Conference of Bar Examiners

Past Chair of the Board of Trustees of the National  
Conference of Bar Examiners

Emeritus Member and former Chairman of the Florida  
Board of Bar Examiners, FBBE

Selected by the Florida Supreme Court to Chair the FBBE  
Testing Commission

Florida Supreme Court's Commission on Professionalism

The Inaugural Florida Bar Education Law Certification  
Committee

Fellow of the American Bar Foundation

Council of School Attorneys of National School Boards  
Association

Education Law Association

The Florida Bar's Vision 2016 Commission

American Bar Association

St. Andrews Bay American Inn of Court

The Florida Bar



*About Franklin:*

Franklin R. Harrison is a Founding Partner with Harrison Sale McCloy Attorneys at Law and Managing Lawyer of the Firm's Florida offices. Mr. Harrison practices in the Panama City office. His primary areas of practice are real estate, business and education law. Mr. Harrison heads the Firm's real estate department and is Board Certified by The Florida Bar as an Education Law attorney.

Mr. Harrison earned both his J.D. and Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from the University of Florida, where he was elected President of Florida Blue Key and the University of Florida Hall of Fame.

Mr. Harrison has served as Chairman of the Bay County Economic Development Alliance, Chairman of the Bay County Chamber of Commerce, President of the Florida School Board Attorney's Association, President of the Bay County Bar Association, and as a member of the 14th Judicial Circuit Nominating Commission.

Mr. Harrison is a member of the Council of School Attorneys of the National School Boards Association; the Education Law Section of the Florida Bar; and the Education Law

Association. He is admitted to practice in Florida and the federal courts in the Northern and Middle Districts of Florida. In addition to his real estate work Mr. Harrison serves as the Board Attorney for the School Board of Bay County, a position he has held since 1979. Mr. Harrison received the Florida School Boards Association's Richard "Spike" Fitzpatrick Award in 2010, was voted one of Florida's Legal Elite by Florida Trend in 2010, was awarded the Lauren Merriam Memorial Award by the Bay County Chamber of Commerce in 2011, and received the C. Graham Carothers Award of Excellence from the Florida School Board Attorneys Association in 2013.

**Jennifer Gutai Comella**

*Education:*

J.D., 2010, Florida State University College of Law  
B.A., Political Science 2006, *magna cum laude*, University at Buffalo

*Community and Professional Memberships:*

Destin Area Chamber of Commerce Board Member (2018-present).  
Walton County Bar Association Board Member (Secretary, Pres-Elect; 2018-present).  
Okaloosa Florida Association of Women Lawyers (OFAWL) Board Member (Secretary, Pres-Elect, President and Chapter Representative to the Florida Association of Women Lawyers (FAWL); 2016-present).  
The Florida Bar Member (admitted 2010).  
Okaloosa County Bar Association Member.  
Destin Forward (Class of 2019; Leadership Award Winner voted by the class).  
Leadership Okaloosa (Class of 2019).  
Young Lawyers Division of the Okaloosa Bar Association former Board Member (Treasurer, Vice-President, President; 2015-2018).



*About Jennifer:*

Jennifer Gutai Comella is an Associate in the Destin Office. Her practice areas include community association law, real estate litigation, landlord-tenant, collections, local government law, and business/commercial litigation.

Jennifer earned her law degree from Florida State University College of Law. During her time at FSU she served as a legal writing teaching assistant, a mentor for the Summer for Undergraduates Program, and was active on the Moot Court team and Moot Court Board. She participated in multiple moot court competitions during law school including arguing before the Florida Supreme Court after finishing in the Final Four of the Intramural competition and taking first place with her teammates at the Gabrielli National Family Law Competition. She also received book awards for receiving the highest grade in the class for Advanced Legal Research and Insurance Law.

After law school, Jennifer spent a year practicing Family law in the Jacksonville area and then four years practicing insurance defense in Panama City before beginning to practice law in Destin. Jennifer has experience handling many different kinds of cases over the years, and has practiced in thirteen different counties across North Florida. She has drafted appellate briefs for appeals in the 1st and 5th District Courts of Appeal and served as second chair in two multi-day civil trials. Jennifer has been practicing law on the Emerald Coast since 2011 and is active in her community.

**Hayward Dykes, Jr.**

*Education:*

B.S., 1998, Florida State University

J.D., 2001, The University of Mississippi School of Law

*Community and Professional Memberships:*

Destin Forward (2008 - 2009)

Destin Area Chamber of Commerce Board Member (2012 - Present)

Destin Area Rotary Club (2006 - 2013)

Member Destiny Worship Center (2012 – Present)

Okaloosa Bar Association

Walton Bar Association

Florida Bar First Circuit Grievance Committee “B” (2012 - 2015, Chairperson 2014 - 2015)

Florida Municipal Attorneys Association (2007 – Present)

Admitted to U.S. Middle District of Florida 2002

Admitted to U.S. Northern District of Florida 2006

Admitted to Northern District of Florida Bankruptcy Court 2009

Admitted to the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals 2010

Admitted to U.S. Supreme Court 2011



*About Hayward:*

Hayward Dykes, Jr. is a Member in the Hand Arendall Harrison Sale Destin Office. His primary areas of practice are Civil Litigation, Criminal Litigation, Contracts, Construction Law, Local Government Law, and Business Law. Mr. Dykes earned his J.D. from the University of Mississippi where he served on the moot court board, was a member of the Phi Delta Phi Legal Fraternity and was a member of the environmental law association. He earned his B.S. from Florida State University in Criminology.

Mr. Dykes is admitted to practice in Florida, the U.S. Middle District of Florida, the U.S. Northern District of Florida, the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals and the U.S. Supreme Court. He served as an Assistant State Attorney in the 6th Judicial Circuit for three years handling both misdemeanor and felony cases. Also, he has handled trials and appeals in state and federal courts for several clients. He was voted to Florida Trends, Florida Legal Elite Up & Comers for 2010. One of 111 attorneys in the State of Florida voted by their peers in the Legal Elite balloting.

**Dion J. Moniz**

*Education:*

J.D., 2000, *Cum Laude*, Florida State University College of Law

B.S., 1996, *Cum Laude*, Florida State University

*Community and Professional Memberships:*

Board of Directors and Vice-Chair of Community Development and Economic Affairs - Destin Chamber of Commerce

Board of Directors and Executive Committee - Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation

Rotary Foundation & Grants President-Elect - Rotary Club of Destin

Past Treasurer & Rotary Foundation Chair - Rotary Club of Panama City

Past President and Board Member - Bay, Franklin, Gulf Healthy Start Coalition

Past Chair - Bay County Chamber of Commerce Junior Leadership Bay Program

Past Co-Chair - 14th Judicial Circuit First Saturday Legal Clinic

Walton County Chamber of Commerce

Bay County Chamber of Commerce

Okaloosa County Bar Association

Walton County Bar Association

Bay County Bar Association

Admitted to The Florida Bar, U.S. District Courts of the Northern District of Florida, The Alabama Bar, and Middle and Southern Districts of Alabama.



*About Dion:*

Dion J. Moniz is a Partner at the Firm and manages the Destin and the Santa Rosa Beach Offices. He represents numerous businesses and individuals throughout Northwest Florida with issues involving civil or commercial litigation, business law, real estate transactions and litigation, landlord-tenant, collections, insurance coverage disputes, and workers' compensation defense.

Mr. Moniz earned his Juris Doctor from the Florida State University College of Law, Cum Laude. He earned his B.S. degree from Florida State University, Cum Laude. Mr. Moniz is admitted to practice in Florida, Alabama, the U.S. District Courts of the Northern District of Florida, and the Middle and Southern Districts of Alabama.

Mr. Moniz is active in the local bar and community. He is the Past-President of the Rotary Club of Destin. He also serves as Chair of the Destin Chamber of Commerce and Chair-Elect of the Mattie Kelly Arts Foundation. He previously served as Chair (one year) and board member (six years) for the Bay, Franklin, Gulf Healthy Start Coalition, as Treasurer (three years) and Foundation Chair (four years) for the Panama City Rotary Club, as Chair (one year) and steering committee

member (three years) for the Bay County Chamber of Commerce Junior Leadership Bay Program, and as Co-Chair of the 14th Judicial Circuit First Saturday Legal Clinic. He also served for seven years as a student mentor at Rosenwald Middle School, and volunteered for four years as a Rotary Reader for the Early Learning Coalition of Northwest Florida's Rotary Read Aloud project.

## REFERENCES

William Husfelt, Superintendent of Schools (Bay County)  
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