

Smith Gambrell Russell and Freeborn & Peters to Combine, Creating Global AmLaw 150 Firm

Combination of firms with Southeastern and Chicago roots will result in a nearly 400-lawyer firm with 14 domestic and international offices

ATLANTA and CHICAGO, January 24, 2023 – [Smith, Gambrell & Russell, LLP](#) and [Freeborn & Peters LLP](#) announced today that their respective partnerships have unanimously approved a combination of the two law firms. The firms – with a shared strategic vision and complementary high-value, top-tier markets and practice areas – will operate under the Smith Gambrell Russell name, effective March 1.

With strong transactional and litigation platforms, the combination will result in a global firm of nearly 400 attorneys in 14 domestic and global offices, and more than \$260 million in gross annual revenues. Based on those numbers, the combined firm would have ranked approximately 132 on the 2022 Am Law 200 and 116 on the NLJ 500.

“As we began discussions of a possible combination in August, it quickly became clear that this was an exceptional opportunity to bring together two strong firms, with similar collegial cultures, operations, and ambitious plans for strategic expansion in complementary geographic markets and practice areas,” said [Stephen M. Forte](#), SGR’s managing partner and chair of the executive committee. “We had a shared vision, and a combination could accelerate our growth in a way that single and small group lateral hires could not. We can do together what we couldn’t do alone, and we can do it without compromising our culture.”

“It’s rare to see a combination that is so mutually beneficial. For us, it fits perfectly within our strategic plan to bolster our corporate practice, expand to key markets across the United States, and significantly grow in the highly competitive New York market,” said [Joseph T. McCullough IV](#), chair of Freeborn’s executive committee. “This immediately achieves all those objectives. The same is true internationally in England and Germany where SGR already has successful offices. We do a substantial amount of work for London clients and have a large client base in Germany, and this gives the combined firm a great platform to expand the work we do for clients in both countries as well.”

The combination aligns both firms’ practice area strengths. SGR’s existing branded national and global practices, particularly corporate and other transactional disciplines, are areas that Freeborn has been seeking to grow. Freeborn’s deep litigation bench augments the existing litigation capabilities that SGR added in Chicago in 2022 through its combination with litigation boutique Figliulo & Silverman P.C. “In less than a year, SGR has combined with two independent, Chicago-based law firms and is really making a mark as an exciting place to practice law,” said [James R. Figliulo](#) of SGR, who will be co-managing partner of the Chicago office with Freeborn’s [William E. Russell](#).

In addition, SGR’s domestic and global aviation finance, international transactional, and intellectual property practices will be complemented by Freeborn’s acclaimed international arbitration, bankruptcy, and insurance and reinsurance practices.

Freeborn and SGR also are similarly aligned geographically. Both firms concentrate their lawyers in high value, top-tier markets, which include overlapping strategic offices in Chicago and New York, and in Florida where the combined firm will add Tampa to its existing footprint of Jacksonville and Miami. Freeborn’s strong Chicago brand was particularly attractive to SGR, as it adds more than 100 lawyers in one of the nation’s most important business centers. Following this combination, the firm’s three largest offices by attorney headcount will be in Atlanta (with approximately 140 lawyers), Chicago (with approximately 110 lawyers), and New York (with approximately 60 lawyers). Both firms also achieve international growth objectives through this combination, with SGR’s existing London and Munich offices providing a platform for Freeborn to better service existing and future international clients, and SGR complementing its strong global corporate practice with Freeborn’s international litigation capabilities. The footprint of the new firm lays the foundation for future growth in all its existing key markets, domestically and internationally.

Forte added: “A significant factor in moving forward with this combination was our ability to expand our client service capabilities while making their transition virtually seamless. Whether a legacy SGR or Freeborn client or a new client, this combination provides enhanced depth and breadth of service. They will have a single law firm that can expertly handle all their work and do so with the reasonable rates, efficient operations, and client-first culture they already know.”

The firms will share leadership responsibilities for the combined SGR, with a mix of SGR and Freeborn partners serving on the executive and compensation committees and in office and practice management. McCullough will be a member of the executive committee, and Forte will remain the firm's managing partner and chair of the executive committee.

About Smith Gambrell Russell

SGR is a full service, international law firm that advises regional, national, and global businesses on a wide range of legal matters. The firm's 285 attorneys provide legal counsel in more than 45 specialized practice areas, including corporate transactions, litigation, intellectual property, aviation, banking, real estate, construction, employment law, and employee benefits and executive compensation. Founded in 1893, SGR has offices in Atlanta; Austin; Charlotte; Chicago; Jacksonville, Fla.; London; Los Angeles; Miami; Munich; New York; Southampton; and Washington, D.C. For more information, please visit sgrlaw.com.

About Freeborn & Peters

Freeborn & Peters LLP is a full-service law firm with international capabilities and offices in Chicago; New York; Springfield, Ill.; and Tampa, Fla. The firm serves clients across a broad range of sectors and targeted industries through its pioneering interdisciplinary approach. Freeborn's major achievements in litigation are reflective of the firm's established reputation as a Litigation Powerhouse®, with one of the largest litigation departments among full-service firms of its size. Freeborn fully embraces its core values of integrity, effectiveness, teamwork, caring and commitment, and embodies them through high standards of client service and responsive action. Freeborn is committed to always looking ahead and seeking better ways to help its clients achieve greater success. For more information, please visit www.freeborn.com.

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