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Husch Blackwell Adds Three Partners in Houston

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TRIO'S ARRIVAL ELEVATES FIRM'S TEXAS PUBLIC LAW PRACTICE

Husch Blackwell is pleased to announce the addition of three partners—former Harris County Judge Robert Eckels, former Houston City Attorney Arturo Michel, and Sandy Hellums-Gomez—to its Houston office. These attorneys bring significant public law experience to the firm bolstering Husch Blackwell's roster of Texas lawyers with regulatory and governmental backgrounds and enhancing the firm's ability to service all types of public entities, including cities, counties, schools, and special purpose districts.

For 12 years Robert Eckels served in the Texas House of Representatives (1983-95) and also served as the County Judge of Harris County from 1995 to 2007. During his time in public service, Eckels earned accolades for spearheading numerous high-profile initiatives in response to crisis, including providing shelter for more than 250,000 people affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. He was also a guiding hand in helping to build the Houston Transtar Transportation and Emergency Operations Center, which assists local governments and emergency responders in serving and protecting residents during disasters and emergencies and coordinates the transportation systems of TxDOT, METRO, HCTRA, and the surrounding cities. Most recently, Eckels is a founder and director at Texas Central Railway, the company undertaking the development, design, construction, finance, and operation of a new high-speed passenger train line between the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex and Greater Houston.

An attorney with more than 30 years of public law experience, Arturo Michel served as the Houston City Attorney under Mayor Bill White from 2004 to 2010. He oversaw a 100-lawyer department with an annual budget of more

than \$40 million. Michel led the department on a wide range of matters including intergovernmental relations, governance and compliance, voting rights and elections, and ethics, among many others. He successfully oversaw the implementation of the City's diversity program and the creation of Discovery Green, the 12-acre urban park and event venue in downtown Houston. In private practice, Michel regularly serves as general counsel to a variety of large entities, including Houston Independent School District, Houston Community College, and the Tejano Center for Community Concerns. A University of Michigan law graduate, he has been the recipient of many honors and awards including being named Attorney of the Year by Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

Sandy Hellums-Gomez brings almost 20 years of public law experience to Husch Blackwell. She represents an array of educational institutions, from K-12 to colleges, as well as other local governmental entities. Her practice focuses on governance and compliance with an emphasis on complex public business and infrastructure matters. Hellums-Gomez works closely with her clients, often embedded directly with employees, with the goal of achieving compliance while executing core functions. Recently, she successfully oversaw the procurement and legal compliance of a \$2 billion bond program for the largest independent school district in Texas. She also regularly provides training and investigation guidance on issues related to procurement, contracting, and federal funding. Currently, she serves as Secretary of the Texas State Bar Government Law Section and has been repeatedly named a Texas Super Lawyer in the area of Schools and Education.

"We are very excited to be joined by such distinguished lawyers," said Kate David, Husch Blackwell's Houston office managing partner. "The caliber of their practices and their ability to solve problems will further differentiate our public law team as being among the finest in Texas."

The arrival of Eckels, Michel, and Hellums-Gomez adds to Husch Blackwell's recent surge in Texas. In April 2018 the firm announced a major expansion of 14 Texas-based lawyers. Additionally, during the fourth quarter of 2018 Husch Blackwell relocated its Houston and Dallas offices to accommodate recent and prospective growth.

"We continue to look for growth opportunities in the Texas legal market," said Husch Blackwell's chief executive Paul Eberle. "Finding the right fit—both from a practice standpoint and in terms of cultural compatibility—is not easy. In Robert, Sandy and Arturo we are gaining terrific colleagues, as well as exceptionally talented lawyers whose expertise will greatly benefit our clients."