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Katten Launches New Practice Focused on ESG Risk and Investigations

India D. Williams joins firm as practice co-chair with partner Johnjerica Hodge

(CHICAGO and WASHINGTON, DC) Katten announced today the launch of its ESG Risk and Investigations practice led by partners Johnjerica Hodge and India D. Williams. The two will leverage their considerable experience in environmental, social and governance (ESG), corporate compliance and internal investigations to further build on the firm's capabilities in the ESG space, which focuses on adopting environmental and social policies that promote sustainability and mitigate risk in a manner that creates long-term value for clients and investors.

"We are excited to welcome India to Katten, to work alongside Johnjerica in leading this essential practice area for Katten and our clients," said Katten Chairman Roger P. Furey. "As ESG issues are becoming more and more important, we are pleased to be further developing this growing practice area that will benefit a great number of our clients."

Katten's ESG practice addresses the myriad of white collar, compliance, corporate and insolvency needs public and private companies in the United States and abroad have. Specifically, firm attorneys help companies identify their ESG-related risks, establish the necessary policies and procedures to establish or enhance their ESG programs, and provide in-depth, independent assessments of their impact on, among other things, racial equity, civil rights, human rights, workplace culture and gender pay parity.

"As a legal partner to our clients, the Katten team proactively identifies potential ESG issues before they arise. A savvy offensive strategy reduces risks and lowers legal spend, but we also know how to play defense as well, so if an ESG issue emerges, we want to be our client's first call," Williams said.

Williams, who joined Katten last week from Kirkland and Ellis, has deep experience in negotiating high-dollar finance deals, handling white collar investigations, and advising corporate and capital markets clients on ESG enforcement actions, Nasdaq board diversity litigation, and climate change regulations. Last year, she was a keynote panelist and spoke at a roundtable on ESG & Racial Equity Audits at the Driving Diversity in Law & Leadership Conference.

Hodge and Williams are co-authoring a book on ESG slated to be published this year. Both have received certificates from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania after completing programs on “ESG Risks and Opportunities” and “ESG and Social Activism” as well as from University of California, Berkeley, School of Law on “Sustainable Capitalism and ESG.” The two recently taught a course together as adjunct professors at the University of Alabama School of Law, their alma mater, that focused on the role of racial equity audits in the ESG movement. They are scheduled to team up again on another course, “ESG: Human Capital Management and Racial Equity Audits,” at George Mason University’s Antonin Scalia Law School.

“We intentionally created a group that is diverse in so many ways: race, gender, age and experience. Because of that diversity, we understand the social issues and business implications our clients face. When you combine our diversity with our focus on the breadth of issues within the purview of ESG, we are poised to handle the range of ESG needs our clients face — both now and in the future,” Hodge said.

In addition to Hodge and Williams, the cross-functional ESG Risk and Investigations team includes Gil M. Soffer, Litigation department co-chair, former federal prosecutor, senior DOJ official, and member of the Racial Justice Diversity Committee for the US District Court for the Northern District of Illinois; Leslie D. Minier, Chief Diversity Partner and founder of the firm’s diversity committee; Danette R. Edwards, a Securities Litigation partner and former Senior Counsel in the SEC’s Enforcement Division; and a deep bench of other Katten attorneys who concentrate on white-collar defense, internal investigations, appellate litigation and regulatory compliance.

This practice will complement services the firm already provides to clients in monitoring regulatory and enforcement trends related to ESG, working with asset managers to integrate ESG considerations into fund structures and strategies, creating and bolstering diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)-focused programs, and counseling on board composition and other corporate governance matters.

Katten is a full-service law firm with approximately 700 attorneys in locations across the United States and in London and Shanghai. Clients seeking sophisticated, high-value legal services turn to Katten for counsel locally, nationally and internationally. The firm’s core areas of practice include corporate, financial markets and funds, insolvency and restructuring, intellectual property, litigation, real estate, structured finance and securitization, transactional tax planning, private credit and private wealth. Katten represents public and private companies in numerous industries, as well as a number of government and nonprofit organizations and individuals. For more information, visit katten.com.

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