

Subject: A Message from the Bankruptcy Judges of the Middle District of Florida

Your Pro Bono Work – We See You and We Salute You!

The Court is grateful for all the work our Bar is doing on the pro bono front! Here's a little perspective and some important updates.

Notices to Pro Se Filers

Starting in September 2022, the Court began mailing (at the Court's expense) Division-specific notices to all pro se debtors that lists the resources available to pro se bankruptcy parties, including our virtual and in-person clinics, legal aid organizations, and other valuable information. When directed by a judge, the Court also mails a notice to pro se creditors or defendants in adversary proceedings. Special thanks to Aaron Irving with Jacksonville Legal Aid for recently updating the notices to add QR codes for easier access to information.

From September through December 2022, the Clerk's office mailed 389 notices of pro bono resources to pro se filers; and in 2023, the Clerk's office sent 1,456 notices to pro se filers. Through March 2024, the Court has sent 422 notices to pro se filers.

The Middle District's Bankruptcy Virtual Pro Se Clinic

The Virtual Pro Se Clinic is an online platform through which pro se parties schedule a 30-minute free consultation by Zoom or telephone with an attorney.

In 2022, during the four months of the virtual clinic's operation (September to December), Middle District attorneys conducted 87 "no charge" consultations. In 2023, our attorneys conducted 492 consultations. And from January through March 2024, attorneys conducted 137 consultations.

Thanks to all the attorneys who have donated their time to consult with pro se parties (a full list is below, noting those who conducted ten or more consultations) and a special shout out to Traci Stevenson, who consulted with a whopping 285 pro se parties in 2023!

Now on to the not-so-good news. Although 192 attorneys have registered to provide consultations through the virtual clinic, only 22 attorneys actually conducted a consultation in 2023, and, between January and March, 2024, only eight attorneys have consulted with a pro se party. In other words, while we applaud those who have signed up to serve as volunteer attorneys, what's really important, especially as bankruptcy filings continue to increase, is for attorneys to follow up and provide consultations through the virtual clinic. If you have questions on how to get more involved, please go to www.bankruptcyproseclinic.com or contact the clinic's Website Administrator, John Schumpert, at johnschumpert@gmail.com.

The Court's Legal Assistance Program

The Court's Legal Assistance Program ("LAP") enables low-income individual debtors (and in some instances, their spouses and former spouses) and low-income individual creditors to receive free legal services in certain types of contested matters and proceedings. Pro se parties may seek the appointment of a pro bono attorney by submitting an application to the Clerk's Office or may be referred to the LAP by the presiding bankruptcy judge.

The Court maintains a list of attorneys who have volunteered to accept a request to serve as a pro bono attorney for a qualifying low-income individual. We hope that all attorneys will consider volunteering for LAP by completing the form at: [volunteer_form.pdf \(uscourts.gov\)](#) and emailing it to: flmb_probono@flmb.uscourts.gov.

The Court recently updated the LAP to expand the types of matters for which LAP is available. These include:

- Adversary proceedings or motions relating to the debtor's entitlement to a discharge and/or the dischargeability of a debt, including motions for a hardship discharge under 11 U.S.C. § 1328(b).
- Contested matters concerning the debtor's claimed exemptions.
- Representation of spouses and former spouses of debtors in connection with the dischargeability of obligations under marital settlement agreements and/or judgments for the dissolution of marriage.
- Representation of an individual defendant in an action to recover money or property under 11 U.S.C. §§ 542, 544, or 547- 550.
- Other matters referred by the bankruptcy judge assigned to the case.

Thank you!

In addition to the formal pro bono programs discussed above, many consumer lawyers step up to assist pro se parties at in-person hearings and, during Zoom hearings, by providing their telephone numbers to the pro se parties. The Court appreciates this "real-time" assistance as much as the pro se parties do!

All of the Middle District's bankruptcy judges are grateful to our volunteer lawyers, the continued support from our volunteer bar associations, and the great work of our legal aid organizations to support the virtual clinic, our in-person clinics, and other efforts to help pro se parties. We welcome input from the bar on how the Court can continue to support pro bono efforts and work together to continue to make improvements when and where needed.

Virtual Clinic Volunteers

Volunteers (2023)	Consultations in 2023
Traci Stevenson	285
Alec Solomita	37
Nina LaFleur	30
Luis Rivera	30
Michael Barnett	23
Kathleen DiSanto	21
Kristina Feher	15
Kevin Paysinger	12
Jonathan Sykes	12
Thomas Adam	
Andrea Anderson	
Robert Branson	
Nicole Carnero	
Gregory Champeau	
Eugene Johnson	
Amy Leitch	
Liz McCausland	
Allison Moscato	
Lauren Stricker	
Jonathan Tolentino	
Allan Wulbern	

Total Consultations in 2023	504
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Volunteers (2024)	Consultations in 2024
Traci Stevenson	56
Michael Barnett	22
Nina LaFleur	18
Kathleen DiSanto	12
Luis Rivera	12
Alec Solomita	
Lauren Stricker	
Jonathan Sykes	

Total Consultations January through March 2024	134
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