



## **DISTRICT-WIDE STEERING COMMITTEE UPDATE**

By Douglas W. Neway

On November 7, 2018, the Steering Committee hosted its 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Bench Bar Conference at the Sam Gibbons Federal Courthouse. The Conference was well attended and included judges, courtroom personnel, trustees, and attorneys from each division in the Middle District. Additionally, faculty members and law students from the University of Florida, Stetson, FAMU, Barry, and Thomas M. Cooley law schools were invited to participate.

This year's topics of discussion were Fostering Diversity and Inclusion of Women and Minorities in the practice of Bankruptcy and Suggested Improvements to the Administration of Pro Se Debtor and Pro Bono cases.

The conference consisted of eight groups containing each constituency in the bankruptcy process that spent about an hour discussing each topic. The goal was to come up with valuable ideas and suggestions for improvement to the practice of bankruptcy district-wide. After each discussion, the individual groups shared their thoughts with the entire conference, and a report of these ideas will be submitted to the Middle District judges by the Steering Committee for consideration and potential adoption or creation of new district-wide procedures.

The prevailing recommendations at this year's conference included establishing connections, like social events or mentoring programs, among the bankruptcy bar, minority bar associations, and law schools to offer education and to promote the practice of bankruptcy law. Additional recommendations included standardizing the successful practices of each divisions' pro se clinics and establishing a liaison with local law schools to allow for student participation and representation of pro se debtors through the various pro se clinics district-wide.

The Steering Committee appreciates the willing participation of all those who came from each division to participate and provide valuable feedback, and we commend the judges of the Middle District for their willingness to consider ideas of district-wide improvement through the "bottom up" approach they have embraced.

If you have any immediate questions regarding the Steering Committee, or for its members, please contact Kelley M. Petry at [kmpetrypa@aol.com](mailto:kmpetrypa@aol.com).