

Pro Bono Spotlight: Helping Those Who Need to File Bankruptcy **By: Kathy Para, The JBA Pro Bono Committee Chair**

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The Pro Se Bankruptcy Assistance Clinic launched in 2014 continues.

Jason Burgess and Ed Jackson served as the first pro bono attorneys to provide free legal guidance through 20-minute consultations for individuals representing themselves in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Middle District of Florida. Many more have joined forces with them since then.

The Pro Se Bankruptcy Assistance Clinic is a collaboration of the Jacksonville Bankruptcy Bar Association, Jacksonville Area Legal Aid and Three Rivers Legal Services.

Gull Weaver, deputy-in-charge for the Middle District of Florida Jacksonville Division, has been instrumental in facilitating the clinic since its beginning. Judges and court staff are enthusiastically providing information to the litigant.

Fliers are available in courtrooms and in the reception area describing the clinic for members of the public. Pro se bankruptcy filers are encouraged to come to the clinic to meet one-on-one with a bankruptcy attorney to receive brief legal guidance.

The attendees do not need appointments. They sign statements verifying they understand the attorney is not agreeing to begin representation. They are simply providing insight and information on the process and options available.

The attorney can help the litigant understand the bankruptcy process and provide limited case-specific advice, but he/she cannot represent the litigant in court or file pleadings.

The litigant also receives information on available online resources, upcoming Ask-A-Lawyer events and the monthly "Is Bankruptcy Right for Me?" clinic held at Jacksonville Area Legal Aid, presented by Jackson.

In addition to Burgess and Jackson, these bankruptcy attorneys have served as pro bono advisers and/or are signed up to participate this year: Alison Emery, Rhan Khawaja, Kevin Paysinger, Jay Brown, Roger Cruce, Robert Bernard, Taylor King, Dinkins Grange, Amber Hines, Raye Elliott, Alex Dowding, Katie Fackler, Sarah Mannion, Rob Heekin and Ramona Chaplin.

More bankruptcy attorneys are needed to assist with this valuable resource. Experienced attorneys who would like to provide guidance from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on the second Wednesday of the month in rooms 4303 and 4403 of the federal courthouse should contact Para at kathy.para@jaxlegalaid.org.

The stated mission of the bankruptcy court is: “Our Court serves the public by processing and deciding bankruptcy cases with fairness, impartiality and excellence, while treating everyone with dignity, integrity and respect.”

By providing legal guidance and resources to those who are representing themselves in this process, pro bono attorneys are integral partners in fulfilling that commitment.

For more information on this and other pro bono opportunities throughout the 4th Judicial Circuit and beyond, attorneys are encouraged to contact Para at kathy.para@jaxlegalaid.org.