

Pro Bono Assistance – from a Courtroom Deputy’s Perspective
By: Pam Arciola, Judge McEwen’s Back-up Courtroom Deputy

I've been a case manager for 24 years. Over the years, I've received a number of calls from *pro se* debtors seeking assistance by phone and more recently in person while working the Intake department.

We often hear the concern, fear, and uncertainty in their voice by phone and see it on their face in person while in Intake.

Referring debtors to the 9th floor courthouse clinic for their "free of charge" advice by Tampa Bay Bankruptcy Bar Association volunteers and the outside clinic run by Western Michigan University Cooley Law School has not only helped *pro se* debtors, but also the Clerk's Office staff due to the nature of the questions we simply cannot answer.

As a back-up courtroom deputy on June 23, 2015 for Judge McEwen, I had the privilege of seeing a much different angle with the WMU Cooley *pro bono* clinic in action. Debra Steele, a WMU Cooley law student (while supervised by Bert Savage) appeared at the hearing on behalf of a debtor. Each party stated their case; Judge ruled in the debtor's favor.

Judge McEwen later asked the debtor, who was also present in court, how she thought her lawyer was doing. First the smile, then the response "I think she's doing a great job!" There may have been a different outcome if the debtor had not had the *pro bono* assistance available.