

Chief Judge’s Message

By: Hon. Jacob A. Brown

Having survived the government’s longest shutdown in history, which coincided with my start as your Chief Judge, I want to begin by thanking our Clerk’s office, my colleagues on the bench, and the Bar for working together to assure those cases that needed to continue to be processed were processed during the shutdown. This is one of the many examples of the Court and the Bar working together to make sure the bankruptcy system continues to work in times of disruption. So, a real big thank you to everyone for keeping things going.

I was excited to join the Tampa Bay Bankruptcy Bar Association on Thursday, February 5th at 4 p.m. for the Court’s annual State of the District presentation. We broadcast the presentation by Zoom to the Central Florida Bankruptcy Bar Association in Orlando, the Jacksonville Bankruptcy Bar Association in Jacksonville, and the Southwest Florida Bankruptcy Bar Association in Ft. Myers. I appreciate our four voluntary bankruptcy bar associations working together to facilitate this event. I hope to broadcast this program from Ft. Myers in 2027, Orlando in 2028, and Jacksonville in 2029.

As far as statistics go, I recall the smile on Judge Glenn’s face when he would speak and note that business is good. Our Court is consistently in the top 5 of the busiest of the 90 bankruptcy courts in the country. Data shows substantial increases in all chapter filings in the Middle District in 2025, and signs point to continued increased filings in 2026.

The Court continues to face budget challenges and having to do more with less resources. Please know that behind all we do is a dedicated, hardworking Clerk’s Office’s focused on getting things right. We should all be grateful for their continued great work.

With an engineering background, I remain focused on continuing to try to optimize procedures where we can. One big change we have implemented is a longer cycle for implementing the Local Rules. A big thanks to Judge Lori Vaughan for her continued hard work and dedication to assure our Local Rules address issues that we need to address and keeping a focus on optimizing those rules. From my judicial philosophy, a local rule should only be implemented when there are a number of incidences that many of our judges face and that we expect to have to deal with more in the future.

Another focus of mine will be to continue to support pro bono work. Our in-person and virtual clinics are a great help, and I thank everyone involved in keeping those going. Just as we are consistently one of the busiest bankruptcy courts in the country, we also consistently have one of the highest volumes of pro se filings. Each time you help a pro se party, you are helping the entire system. You are saving valuable court time and resources, and you are helping a person in need. We will continue to thank and recognize those of you helping clients on a pro bono basis and encourage those who are not helping to do so.

Looking ahead, please mark off June 12, 2026, for Judge Luis Rivera’s Investiture in Tampa. Planning is underway, more details will be forthcoming, and it is sure to be a special event. We are also targeting the Wednesday afternoon prior to View from the Bench – Tampa for a rescheduled portrait ceremony for Judge Williamson.

I hope 2026 will be a great year for the Bankruptcy Court and the Bar, that we will continue to work together to serve those in need, and that we will do so with happiness, good health, and a bit of prosperity.

Day in and day out, I remember our motto - Our Court serves the public by processing and deciding bankruptcy cases with fairness, impartiality, and excellence, while treating everyone with dignity, integrity, and respect.

To have the opportunity to serve remains an honor. Thank you.