



Clerk's Message

By: José A. Rodriguez, Clerk of Court

I cannot believe that I have already had the privilege of serving as your clerk for a year. I want to thank each of you for making me feel so welcome and for the unwavering support of the judges and the clerk's office throughout this past year.

When I reflect on 2025, I am amazed by the substantial changes and challenges our court faced. More importantly, I am proud of our staff. Their commitment, professionalism, and hard work have been nothing short of inspiring.

The greatest challenge was the anticipated 16% budget reduction for fiscal year 2026. Alarmingly, these reductions are expected to persist for several years. Compounding this, a work measurement study began in September. To make matters worse, from October 1 to November 12, 2025, the federal government entered a shutdown after Congress failed to pass appropriations legislation for the 2026 fiscal year. From October 1 through October 17, the Court operated under Phase 1 of the shutdown, with all staff remaining in pay status using available funding. On October 20, however, our Court officially entered Phase 2, the first time in history that the federal judiciary reached this stage. All Court staff were placed on non-pay status, and staffing was reduced to the minimum necessary to maintain essential operations, defined as those required for the judiciary to carry out its constitutional functions. Staff whose duties were deemed exempt were furloughed on a rotational basis, and the Court closed on Fridays, with all employees teleworking half a day and furloughed for the other half. Despite these challenges, our Court continued to provide exceptional service, and our staff persevered with resilience. On November 12, 2025, the Court returned to normal operations, and we continue to operate under a continuing resolution until January 30, 2026.

One exciting development this past year was the appointment of Judge Rivera. Prior to his arrival, many steps were taken to ensure proper case assignment and workflow. In addition, Court staff carried out the necessary preparations to support the

transition to a new chief judge. Chief Judge Brown officially assumed leadership from Chief Judge Delano on October 1, just in time to navigate the challenges of the government shutdown. My personal thanks go to Judge Delano for her support, guidance, advice, and the occasional conversations that helped me jump start my journey as Clerk of Court.

Another exciting development this year was the implementation of CMAssist, our new workload distribution software, and the transition to divisional based work distribution. This achievement reflects the tremendous effort of our project team, led by Seth Bowe and Dena Eaton, along with many operational and IT staff members. Each contributed meaningfully by reviewing, revising, and recommending updates to Court operations, and many served on multiple committees throughout the process. Our case managers played a vital role in bringing this initiative to life. Kudos to everyone involved for making this project a success.

As we continue learning the system and adjusting to the magnitude of this transition, I'm confident that we will soon settle into a new groove. Kurt Lewin's three-step model of change (Unfreeze, Change, and Refreeze), offers a helpful lens for understanding our journey. We began by "unfreezing" long-standing processes and preparing the organization for new ways of working. We are now in the "change" phase, actively adopting CMAssist and refining our workflows. In time, we will "refreeze," establishing these new practices as our steady, reliable norm. Lewin's framework reminds us that meaningful transformation takes time, intention, and collective effort, and we are well on our way.

This past year, several members of our team had the opportunity to attend the National Conference of Bankruptcy Clerks' annual conference. Thanks to available funding, staff were able to participate in a wide range of high-value educational sessions, including dedicated tracks in human resources, information technology, financial management, and case management. We also proudly supported staff attendance at two major AO events, the Operational Forum and the National IT Conference. These gatherings not only delivered exceptional training and insights but also offered meaningful networking opportunities that strengthened connections across the judiciary community. Looking ahead, we hope to continue supporting staff participation in these valuable professional development events in the coming year, ensuring our team remains informed, connected, and well equipped to meet the evolving needs of our work.

On a personal note, I had the distinct honor of serving as the principal speaker at a recent Naturalization Ceremony conducted by Chief Judge Brown. The occasion was deeply meaningful to me, not only because I was able to welcome new citizens into our American family, but also because I too am a naturalized citizen. Standing before individuals who had just taken their oath of allegiance reminded me of my own

journey. The challenges, hopes, and triumphs that come with embracing a new homeland while honoring the traditions of one's past. To share words of encouragement at such a pivotal milestone was profoundly humbling.

I also want to take a moment to extend my heartfelt gratitude to our entire staff. Your hard work, dedication, and unwavering commitment have been the driving force behind our success. Each of you has contributed in meaningful ways, through innovation, teamwork, and by showing up each day with passion and purpose. Together, you have not only met challenges head-on but have also created an environment where excellence and collaboration thrive.

This past year has reminded me that our greatest strength lies in the people who make up this team. I am deeply proud of what we have accomplished and even more excited about the opportunities ahead. As we step into 2026, let us carry forward the lessons of perseverance and the spirit of collaboration that define us. I am confident that no challenge is too great and no goal beyond reach. Thank you for your resilience, creativity, and dedication to our shared mission. It is a privilege to work alongside such talented individuals.