



Bankruptcy Court Establishes New Procedures To Help Self-Represented Debtors Obtain Legal Services

Courts Adopt Rule for Volunteer Attorneys Providing *Pro Bono* Service

New York bankruptcy court judges have updated court rules that seek to make volunteer attorneys more accessible to individuals who have filed bankruptcy petitions but are unable to afford counsel to represent them in subsequent proceedings, made all the more challenging by Congress' passage last year of amendments to the Bankruptcy Code. The court is also calling for more volunteer attorneys to help self-represented debtors who are facing contested matters and adversary proceedings in bankruptcy court. The new rules, titled *Rules Governing Procedures for Appointment of Pro Bono Counsel in Bankruptcy Proceedings from a Bankruptcy Pro Bono Panel*, were issued jointly last month by the bankruptcy courts of the Eastern and Southern Districts of New York.

The Southern District of New York serves Manhattan, the Bronx and Westchester, Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland and Sullivan counties. The Eastern District serves Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island and Long Island.

In a letter addressed to the private bar, Chief Judges Stuart Bernstein of the Southern District of New York and Melanie Cyganowski of the Eastern District of New York said, "It is vital that the private bar assist in providing representation to indigents. If legal rights are to remain a reality to all citizens, it is essential that indigents be able to obtain representation."

The rules complement the public service work of two organizations that recruit volunteer attorneys for *pro bono* advocacy in the Bankruptcy Courts and will administer the panel of attorneys established under the new rules. The "*Pro Bono* Consumer Bankruptcy Project" of the **City Bar Justice Center** was launched in September, 2004, and the "New York City Bankruptcy Assistance Project" at **Legal Services for New York City** began in January, 2006. Both organizations currently recruit, train, and place volunteer attorneys with indigent debtors who are either in bankruptcy, or contemplating it.

City Bar Bankruptcy Project Director John McManus noted that private attorneys had long expressed an interest in taking on *pro bono* cases from the bankruptcy courts, but that until now, there had been no active panel that could provide training and assistance. "We know the attorneys are there, and the needy debtors are certainly there. Now it will be much easier to bring them together," he said.

William Kransdorf of the Bankruptcy Assistance Project agreed. "Private attorneys have shown a great deal of interest in volunteering for this work." He added that the response to his calls for volunteers had been "quite heartening."

How to Apply

Attorneys interested in serving on the Bankruptcy Court *Pro Bono* Panel are urged to telephone City Bar Bankruptcy Project Director John McManus at (212) 382-6698; or William Kransdorf at the NYC Bankruptcy Project at (646) 442-3646 to obtain an application form. Additionally, an application may be obtained at the following websites, www.nysb.uscourts.gov and www.nyeb.uscourts.gov.