

# The Bankruptcy Bench and Bar Collaborate to Increase Pro Bono Bankruptcy Services



By Jessica Grossarth Kennedy

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Over the years, the Connecticut Bar Association Commercial Law and Bankruptcy Section has worked with the judges of the United States Bankruptcy Court, District of Connecticut to provide pro bono bankruptcy services to the community. Given the continuous and growing need for volunteers to assist with filing bankruptcy cases for the indigent, the bankruptcy judges and the bar are always searching for creative solutions to further pro bono bankruptcy assistance in Connecticut.

In June 2016, Chief Bankruptcy Judge Julie A. Manning alerted the section's officers to the American College of Bankruptcy Foundation's grant offering for pro bono bankruptcy programs. Eager to collaborate with the bankruptcy bench on pro bono efforts, the officers submitted an application to the foundation for a \$3,000 grant for projects that would train and supervise attorneys who volunteer or represent indigent debtors without charge, and encourage and promote legal assistance to the poor in the State of Connecticut; the application was approved.

Section members Tom Gugliotti, Bonnie Mangan, and Susan Williams explored the possibility of utilizing the grant funds in connection with the Connecticut Community Law Center (CCLC), which is an incubator initiative of UConn School of Law and the Hartford County Bar Association. The incubator opened in February 2017 in William F. Starr Hall on the UConn Law campus in Hartford, and aims to help people who have traditionally been underserved by the justice system: low and moderate income clients who don't qualify for legal aid, but can't afford standard legal fees. The law school provides office space and support for up to six new lawyers who receive training and experience to assist them in opening solo practices, and to encourage them to deliver pro bono legal services or services at an affordable cost.

Since bankruptcy services and training had not previously been offered at the incubator, the grant funds were utilized to purchase bankruptcy software essential to prepare and file a bankruptcy case properly. Additionally, the funds were used to purchase research tools including the Bankruptcy Code, Federal Rules of Bankruptcy Procedure, Federal Rules of Evidence, and materials from the National Consumer Law Center. Attorneys Mangan and Williams are actively volunteering their time to train the incubator attorneys on the software. The goal of the bankruptcy software training is twofold: to provide instruction to lawyers on the software using pro bono cases referred by legal aid, and to introduce the bankruptcy practice to new attorneys who wouldn't have otherwise been exposed to that area of law, thereby increasing the number of volunteers who provide pro bono bankruptcy services in Connecticut.

Bankruptcy attorneys who are willing to mentor and donate their time to the program should contact section members Bonnie Mangan at [bonnie.mangan@manganlaw.com](mailto:bonnie.mangan@manganlaw.com) and Susan Williams at [susan@williams-law.com](mailto:susan@williams-law.com). The incubator program is receiving the pro bono bankruptcy referrals through the Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut, Pro Bono Network. In the event you encounter a potential client that you believe would qualify for pro bono representation, a referral to the Statewide Legal Services would ensure that the case be directed to the incubator program or other qualified attorneys that participate and offer pro bono services.

As a result of the concern and initiative of Chief Judge Manning and the superb leadership and diligence of a few motivated section members, a bankruptcy pro bono mechanism was born! **CL**