

Pro Bono Opportunity with the Dirksen Courthouse Bankruptcy Help Desk

You can help make the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Northern District of Illinois more accessible to pro se parties, debtors, and creditors, by staffing the court's help desk.

What is it? The bankruptcy court provides a help desk at Chicago's federal courthouse in conjunction with the Chicago Bar Association and LAF (formerly the Legal Assistance Foundation). Volunteer attorneys who staff the desk offer free bankruptcy advice to parties without lawyers.

Why the need? Because of recent funding cuts, the help desk has had to reduce its hours. The desk is now staffed only three days a week. Too often, people in need of help are forced to navigate a complex legal process alone.

What will I do? As a volunteer attorney, you will answer general questions about bankruptcy law and counsel clients on their cases. You will also help clients prepare forms and draft motions.

Will there be training? Yes. Before seeing clients, you will have online training and shadow an experienced volunteer. There will be occasional group training. You will be added to a group listserv that provides a continuing way to discuss relevant issues. And an experienced lawyer will also be available to answer questions and provide support.

What's the commitment? Limited. Two volunteer attorneys are scheduled each day and see a total of ten clients. A shift typically lasts two and a half to three hours. Once the shift is over, the volunteer has no further obligations to the clients seen that day. Volunteer lawyers are expected to take at least one shift every three months, though many volunteer once a month.

What experience is necessary? Volunteers need some bankruptcy experience – preferably at least a year, though exceptions can be made if you work at a firm that provides bankruptcy expertise you can call on.

What about malpractice insurance? And conflicts? Volunteers are covered by LAF's malpractice insurance. Conflicts questions are addressed in Rule 6.5 of the ABA Model Rules of Professional Responsibility.

New Bonus! Members of the trial bar appointed to represent parties in civil actions in the district court can now perform their required service at the help desk instead.

How do I sign up? Send an e-mail expressing your interest in the bankruptcy help desk to: volunteer@lafchicago.org.