

MINUTES
ATTORNEY ADVISORY GROUP
DECEMBER 5, 2013 @ 10:30 AM
MONTGOMERY, AL

Present:

Honorable William R. Sawyer, Chief Bankruptcy Judge
Honorable Dwight Williams, Bankruptcy Judge
JC Guerrero, Clerk of Court
Doug Young, Chief Deputy Clerk
Teresa Jacobs, Bankruptcy Administrator
Sabrina McKinney, Staff Attorney Chapter 13 Trustee's Office
Daniel G. Hamm, Chapter 7 Trustee
Bowdy J. Brown
Charles E. Grainger, Jr.
Marsha C. Mason
Cameron A. Metcalf
Charles N. Parnell, III

Absent:

Paul D. Esco
Paul J. Spina

1. Opening

Judge Sawyer opened the meeting at 10:30 and welcomed everyone and thanked everyone for being there. Judge Sawyer made a special welcome to the four new members of the Group: Bowdy J. Brown, Charles E. Grainger, Jr., Cameron A. Metcalf, and Paul D. Esco.

2. Old Business

Minutes: JC Guerrero reminded the group that the minutes from these meetings are posted on the court's webpage under Attorney Resources.

Newsletter: JC Guerrero let everyone know that the latest court newsletter, Court News and Views, came out right before Thanksgiving and everyone should have received a copy through e-mail. It is also posted on our webpage. He also told the group that the next newsletter would come out in May of 2014. He reminded everyone that the court is always looking for attorney contributors for short articles.

Opelika courthouse renovation: JC Guerrero informed the group that the Opelika courtroom and chambers renovation was complete (minus a few punch list items). Several members of

the group commented that the new courtroom is a huge improvement over what was there. They commented that the feedback on the renovations has been all positive so far.

MGM courtroom upgrades: JC Guerrero reported the MGM courtrooms received a 10-year facelift. All new courtroom technology equipment and new carpet were installed in Judge Williams' (4C) and Judge Sawyers' (4D) courtrooms.

Chapter 13 presumptive fee: JC Guerrero explained that at the previous Attorney Advisory Group meeting, one of the members asked the judges to consider raising the Chapter 13 presumptive fee in our district. After researching the matter, the judges decided to raise the fee. Effective January 1, 2014, a below-median income Chapter 13 case will have a presumptive fee of \$3000.00 and an above-median income Chapter 13 case will have a presumptive fee of \$3250.00.

3. New Business

Chambers update: JC Guerrero congratulated both Judge Sawyer and Judge Williams on being reappointed to new terms during May and October, respectively. He further explained that Judge Williams' 7-year term as Chief Bankruptcy Judge recently expired. Therefore, Judge Sawyer was reappointed as Chief Bankruptcy Judge for a 7-year term. Lastly, JC Guerrero told the group about Judge Williams' recently hired law clerk, Erin Hoskins.

As part of the Chambers update, Judge Sawyer addressed the recent redistribution of cases between judges. Judge Sawyer explained in order to even out the cases assigned to each judge, he is now covering Chapter 13s in Dothan and Judge Williams is now covering Chapter 7s in Dothan. One of the members brought up a recent scheduling glitch that occurred after the transition. Judge Sawyer acknowledged there had been a few scheduling issues but that the court is working diligently to avoid any future scheduling issues.

Video teleconference (VTC): JC Guerrero reported that VTC service is up and running between Dothan and Montgomery (Courtroom 4F) and will be up and running soon between Opelika and Montgomery (Courtroom 4F). The BA's office has been using the VTC system for some hearings and Judge Sawyer is going to be using it for some hearings soon (February). Note: at the time of posting of these minutes, the VTC connection is up and running between Opelika and Montgomery.

Local Rules Committee: Doug Young reminded the group about the creation of a local rules committee. He explained the committee had met several times since it was created last August. They plan to meet a few more times before they are ready to send recommendations to the judges. Eventually, a draft of the proposed new rules and proposed changes will be posted with a comment period.

Bankruptcy rule amendments: Doug Young also briefly summarized the rule amendments that became effective December 1, 2013. He reminded everyone that more details on the amendments are posted on our website and can be found in our most recent newsletter, *Court News & Views*.

Filing numbers: Doug Young gave a report on filing numbers. Nationally, filings are down by 12 percent for the year ending September 30, 2013. On the other hand, our local filings remained steady for that same time period.

New webpage: JC Guerrero announced that at the end of December, our court will go live with a new website. He explained that while we like our current website, this change serves two useful purposes: 1-it allows us to stay consistent with the national push for a common court website template making it easier for attorneys who practice across districts to more easily find what they are looking for on the websites; and 2-while we regularly review our website, this was a great opportunity to do a hard scrub. He asked the group to give feedback once the new website is up.

Government budget update: JC Guerrero addressed the current status of the national budget and reminded everyone the courts are still operating under a continuing resolution.

4. Upcoming Events

JC Guerrero announced that Attorneys Forums will be held next spring, in all three divisions. The dates are still to be determined. Also, the Attorney Advisory Group will meet again next fall/winter with that date also still to be determined.

5. Around the Room

Judge Sawyer closed the meeting by going around the room and asking if any of the members had any questions or concerns.

One member asked whether we were in the running to receive an additional judgeship. Judge Sawyer said there is not a likelihood of a new judge being assigned here anytime in the very near future.

A few members commented on how well they thought things were going in our district. They specifically mentioned how much they appreciated the court's focus on consistency between judges on procedures and focus on communication with the local bar.

6. Adjournment

Judge Sawyer thanked everyone again for their service to the group. He adjourned the meeting at 11:40.