

The Bench, The Bar, and Bagels – A Perfect Pairing

By: Third Circuit Library Staff

On April 22, the United States District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania hosted a “Coffee and Bagels” meet-and-greet recognizing those attorneys who have supported the Court’s Pro Bono Program. The event was well- attended and marked a meaningful opportunity to celebrate the collaborative efforts between the Bench and Bar in advancing access to justice.

Chief District Judge Cathy Bissoon was joined at the event by District Judges Colville, Fischer, Hardy, Horan, Hornak, Ranjan, Stickman, and Wiegand, along with U.S. Magistrate Judges Brown, Dodge, Kelly and Taylor. The judges, together with members of the Clerk’s Office, and approximately 61 members of the Bar filled the Lancaster Atrium at the Weis Federal Courthouse. Notably, both Chief Judge Bissoon and Judge J. Nicholas Ranjan volunteered with the Court’s Pro Bono Program prior to their appointments to the Bench, reflecting a longstanding commitment to the program’s mission. The strong turnout reflected the continued growth of the Court’s pro bono infrastructure and the commitment of the legal community to addressing the challenges faced by self-represented litigants.

The Court’s Pro Bono Program is designed to address persistent structural barriers in pro se cases, including procedural complexity and evidentiary hurdles. Through mediation and volunteer representation, attorneys provide a more accessible and less adversarial pathway to resolution while simultaneously conserving judicial resources. The gathering served not only as a recognition event, but also as a continuation of the Court’s broader effort to foster a sustainable and engaged pro bono network. The program builds on prior successes, including the June 2025 mediation CLE and the October 2025 trial training program, both of which equipped attorneys with practical tools to effectively represent incarcerated clients and navigate federal litigation. These initiatives have demonstrated that targeted pro bono engagement can improve case outcomes while strengthening the professional development of participating attorneys.

The meet-and-greet provided an opportunity for informal dialogue between judges and practitioners regarding program development, case management efficiencies, and ways to further support volunteer attorneys. In a world often marked by uncertainty and challenge, it was particularly meaningful to see such a large group of trained professionals gathered with a shared commitment to service.

Looking ahead, the Court will continue to build on this momentum. A fall mediation CLE is scheduled for September 2026 and will further expand the pool of attorneys equipped to assist pro bono litigants.