

United States District Court

Southern District of Indiana

Chambers of
Chief Judge Tanya Walton Pratt

Birch Bayh Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse
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December 1, 2021

Members of the Southern District of Indiana Bar:

The United States District Court for the Southern District of Indiana has an ongoing and urgent need to provide counsel for indigent litigants in certain civil cases. In an effort to address this need, Local Rule 87 was adopted in 2016. Local Rule 87, which is entitled Representation of Indigent Litigants, creates a Voluntary Panel consisting of attorneys who are willing to volunteer to represent indigent litigants in civil cases, and an Obligatory Panel from which the court will recruit counsel if no attorney from the Voluntary Panel is available to appear in a given case. Local Rule 87 is a reflection of this court's commitment to provide justice in all cases.

Over the past five years, attorneys on the Voluntary and Obligatory Panels have provided meaningful representation in hundreds of cases. Recruited counsel have participated in settlement conferences, evidentiary hearings, and trials. The court has benefited through recruited counsel's presentation of streamlined filings, improved communication with opposing counsel, and professional briefing of legal issues. Those attorneys who represent indigent litigants pursuant to Local Rule 87 are fulfilling the Oath they took when they were admitted to the Bar of Indiana, the last line of which reads:

I will never reject, from any consideration personal to myself, the cause of the defenseless, the oppressed or those who cannot afford adequate legal assistance; so help me God.

It remains the court's goal to facilitate a program that will fulfill the needs of this district without placing an undue burden on the Bar. Recognizing that appointments made under Local Rule 87 might involve areas of the law with which an attorney might not be familiar, the court continues to invest in resources to assist volunteer and recruited counsel, including continuing legal education programming and materials. The court is currently seeking to contract with an attorney with expertise in federal litigation and prisoner civil rights cases to provide legal advice and mentorship to recruited counsel. More information is available on the court's website.

Your continued support of the court's pro bono efforts is greatly appreciated. We look forward to seeing you in court.

Sincerely,



Hon. Tanya Walton Pratt, Chief Judge
United States District Court
Southern District of Indiana