

Rule 9019-3 MEDIATORS

(a) The Clerk shall establish and maintain a register of persons (the “Register”) qualified and designated by the Court to serve as mediators in the Mediation Program. The Chief Bankruptcy Judge shall appoint a Judge of this Court to serve as the “Mediation Program Administrator.” The Mediation Program Administrator or designee shall receive applications for designation to the Register, maintain the Register, track and compile reports on the Mediation Program, and otherwise administer the program.

(b) Each applicant shall submit to the Mediation Program Administrator a statement of professional qualifications, experience, training, and other information relevant to designation to the Register, using Local Bankruptcy Form 31 (Application for Admission to Bankruptcy Mediation Program Register).

(c) Each applicant shall agree to accept at least one (1) *pro bono* appointment per year as assigned by the Mediation Program Administrator. If after serving in a *pro bono* capacity insufficient mediation matters exist to allow for compensation, credit for *pro bono* service shall be carried into subsequent years in order to qualify the mediator to receive compensation for providing service as a mediator.

(d) Not later than March 1 of every year using Local Bankruptcy Form 31 (Application for Admission to Bankruptcy Mediation Program Register), each applicant accepted for designation to the Register shall reaffirm the continued existence and accuracy of the qualifications, statements, and representations made in the application, and file amendments as needed.

(e) The Court in its sole and absolute determination on any basis shall grant or deny an application. If the Court grants the application, the applicant’s name shall be added to the Register.

(f) A person shall be removed from the Register either at the person’s request or by Court order entered on the sole and absolute determination of the Court. If removed by Court order, the person shall be eligible to file an application for reinstatement after one (1) year.

(g) Before serving as a mediator, each person designated as a mediator shall take the following oath or affirmation:

“I, _____, do solemnly swear [or affirm] that I will faithfully and impartially discharge and perform all the duties incumbent upon me as a mediator in the Mediation Program of the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania without respect to persons and will do so equally with respect to the poor and to the rich.”

(h) Upon assignment of a matter to mediation and unless special circumstances exist as determined by the Court, the parties shall select a mediator and may choose an alternate mediator from the Register whose appointment shall be authorized by the Court. If the parties fail to make such selection within the time frame as set by the Court, then the Court shall appoint a mediator and may appoint an alternate mediator.

(i) If the mediator is unable or elects not to serve, the mediator shall file and serve on all parties to the mediation and on the alternate mediator, within seven (7) calendar days after receipt of a Notice of Appointment, a Notice of Inability or Election Not to Accept the Appointment. The alternate mediator then shall become the mediator, if the alternate does not file and serve on all parties to the mediation a Notice of Inability or Election Not to Accept the Appointment within seven (7) calendar days after receipt of the original mediator's Notice of Inability or Election Not to Accept the Appointment. If neither the mediator nor the alternate mediator can serve, the Court shall appoint another mediator and alternate mediator.

(j) Any person selected as a mediator may be disqualified for bias or prejudice in the same manner that a Judge may be disqualified under 28 U.S.C. § 144. Any person selected as a mediator shall be disqualified in any matter where 28 U.S.C. § 455 would require disqualification if that person were a Judge.

(k) Promptly after receiving Notice of Appointment, the mediator shall make inquiry sufficient to determine whether there is a basis for disqualification under W.PA.LBR 9019-3(j). The inquiry shall include, but shall not be limited to, a search for conflicts of interests in the manner prescribed by the applicable rules of professional conduct for attorney mediators, and by the applicable rules pertaining to the mediator's profession for nonattorney mediators. Within seven (7) calendar days after receiving Notice of Appointment, the mediator shall file with the Court and serve on the parties to the mediation either (1) a statement that there is no basis for disqualification under W.PA.LBR 9019-3(j), and that the mediator has no actual potential conflict of interest, or (2) a Notice of Withdrawal.

(l) A party to the mediation who believes that the assigned mediator and/or the alternate mediator has a conflict of interest shall promptly bring the issue to the attention of the mediator and/or the alternate mediator, as applicable, and to the other parties to the mediation. If the mediator does not withdraw, and the movant is dissatisfied with this decision, the issue shall be brought to the Court's attention by the mediator or any of the parties to the mediation. The Court shall take such action as the Court deems necessary or appropriate to resolve the alleged conflict of interest.

(m) Aside from proof of actual fraud or unethical conduct, there shall be no liability on the part of, and no cause of action shall arise against, any person who is appointed as a mediator pursuant to this Local Bankruptcy Rule on account of any act or omission in the course and scope of such person's duties as a mediator.

(n) Once eligible to serve as a mediator for compensation, which shall be at reasonable rates and subject to judicial review, the mediator may require compensation or reimbursement of expenses as agreed by the parties to the mediation. Prior Court approval shall also be required if the estate is to be charged. If the mediator consents to serve without compensation, and at the conclusion of the first full day of the mediation conference, it is determined by the mediator and the parties to the mediation that additional time will be both necessary and productive in order to complete the mediation, then:

- (1) if the mediator consents to continue to serve without compensation, the parties to the mediation may agree to continue the mediation conference; and

(2) if the mediator does not consent to continue to serve without compensation, the mediator's fees and expenses shall be on such terms as are satisfactory to the mediator and the parties to the mediation, subject to Court approval.

(o) Where the parties have agreed to pay mediation fees and expenses, they shall share equally all such fees and expenses unless the parties to the mediation agree to some other allocation. The Court may, in the interest of justice, determine a different allocation.

(p) If the Court determines that a party to a matter assigned to mediation cannot afford to pay the fees and costs of the mediator, the Court may appoint a mediator to serve *pro bono* as to that party.