

UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT
DISTRICT OF RHODE ISLAND

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Diane Finkle
U.S. Bankruptcy Judge

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A LETTER TO THE RHODE ISLAND BANKRUPTCY BAR

Hello everyone. I hope you and your families are doing well and staying safe. I miss seeing all of you and the in-person interaction. While it has been very difficult these past few months dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, coping with this dramatic change in our lives seems just a little bit easier with the nicer weather and the gradual re-opening of the state. May the worst be behind us.

Through the diligence and enormous efforts of the court's IT team and all our other dedicated employees, the court quickly moved to full remote operations without missing a beat. I am deeply grateful for all their efforts and commitment to ensuring a smooth transition and the maintenance of all the court's operations at nearly the same level as prior to closing the court to the public. It was no small feat! We continue to enhance our IT capabilities to serve you and the public better during these times. Telephonic hearings are proceeding well, and evidentiary hearings and trials will be conducted virtually using the easily accessible platform of ZoomGov.com. To address this evolving situation and alleviate some of the burdens on you, debtors and trustees, I entered several general orders relaxing and amending certain of our local rules and operations. This included modifying the requirement of "wet signatures" on petitions at the time of filing and shifting noticing burdens for certain creditor-wide mailings to the clerk's office. I hope they have achieved their intended goals.

I also want to thank you all for your cooperation and adjustment to these changes in our operations. Clerk of Court Susan Thurston and her team have done an amazing job publicizing information on all of the changes we have made to enable continued full operations while working remotely. If you have not visited the court's [COVID-19 Operations page](#) posted on our website I encourage you to do so. There are also helpful links to various sources of on-going information about the pandemic. I think you will find it informative.

In terms of re-opening the court to the public, our highest priority is the safety and well-being of you, litigants, the public and our employees. Because the court can efficiently operate remotely and conduct business virtually, we will be moving cautiously and carefully. Susan and I are monitoring the situation as the state of Rhode Island slowly moves through the re-opening phases announced by Governor Raimondo. The court will not be re-opening to the public in June, but we will assess the situation later in June in that regard. For everyone's protection, we anticipate any re-opening will be gradual and phased, with safety protocols in place as recommended by the Center for Disease and Control, the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts and the Rhode Island Department of Health. Rest assured that you will have ample notice of such protocols and time to adjust as modifications to the Court's operations are made as we progress through this pandemic.

Should you have questions, need assistance or have suggestions as we navigate these uncharted waters, please reach out to our clerk's office team. Stay Safe Everyone.

With Best Wishes,

