

JUDGE MICHAEL'S POLICY REGARDING SERVICE OF MOTIONS IN CONTESTED MATTERS

As we all know, motions filed in contested matters that request relief from the Court must be served according to Federal Rule of Bankruptcy Procedure 7004. Fed. R. Bankr. P. 9014. This service will normally be memorialized in a certificate of service, which can either be attached to the motion or filed as a separate pleading. Bankr. N.D. Okla. LR 9013-1(G). My staff checks service of all motions to ensure compliance with Rule 7004 and any applicable local rules. In the past, we conducted this review soon after your motion was filed, so that we could alert you to any problems with service. If your motion did not require a filing fee, we usually denied the motion and informed you of the defect. If your motion did require a filing fee, e.g., Motions for Relief from Stay and Motions for Abandonment of Property, we usually tried to give you an opportunity to amend your certificate of service or to re-serve the motion, if necessary. Unfortunately, this practice (which effectively meant that we were checking service twice) has taken staff time away from more pressing Court matters.

The purpose of this memo is to put practitioners on notice that Chambers will not notify you of defects in the service of your motions. What this means for you: We will no longer send you an “Order to Serve Debtor” or an “Order to Provide Proof of Service” prior to denying your motion. **You will be responsible for ensuring that your motion is accompanied by a certificate of service, and that it strictly adheres to this Court’s local rules.** The first notice of defective service that you will get from us will now be in the form of an order denying the motion.

You should familiarize yourself with Bankr. N.D. Okla. Local Rule 9013-1(G), which addresses the time and manner of service of motions. In addition to serving all parties entitled to notice within 2 days of the filing date, your Certificate of Service must be filed within 7 days of the filing date. **Be advised that if your Certificate of Service is not on file within 7 days after filing the motion, your motion will be subject to denial without further notice. See Bankr. N.D. Okla. LR 9013-1(G)(2).**

In order to assist you in getting it right, my staff has enumerated some of the most common problems with service that will cause your motion to be denied:

1. Get the parties right:

- Make sure that all the correct parties are served. For example, Federal Rule of Bankruptcy Procedure 9014 requires that notice of motions for relief “shall be afforded the party against whom relief is sought.” This is little more than common sense codified. If you want to affect someone’s interests, give them notice.
- Motions for Relief from Stay and Motions for Abandonment of Property require service on the *debtor* (including the *joint debtor*, if there is one), the *debtor’s attorney* per Rule 7004(g), and the *trustee*—in addition to any other parties specified by rule or statute.

- Motions for Abandonment **must** also be served on *all creditors* pursuant to Rule 6007(a).
- Motions to Avoid Lien must be served upon the *creditor* whose lien you seek to avoid—in addition to any other parties specified by rule or statute.
- If you are seeking stay relief against a co-debtor under 11 U.S.C. §§ 1201 or 1301, don't forget to serve the *co-debtor*. Just for fun, also take a look at §§ 1201(d) and 1301(d) (twenty day notice required). Note that as long as this type of motion isn't combined with other relief (such as a motion for relief from the automatic stay under 11 U.S.C. § 362), then no fee is required for filing. See the Court's fee schedule at www.oknb.uscourts.gov.

2. Get the content right:

- The Certificate of Service must include the *date of service*, the *manner of service* (whether by personal delivery, first-class mail, certified mail, etc.), and the *names and addresses* of the persons and entities served. Bankr. N.D. Okla. LR 9014-1(C) & 5005-1(E)(2). Note that the Court's Local Rules outline when a separate Certificate of Service is required to supplement the "Notice of Electronic Filing" generated by the ECF System. Bankr. N.D. Okla. LR 9013-1(G) & 5005-1(E).
- When you are specifying the names and addresses, especially of debtors and joint debtors, be careful to serve these parties at the *addresses listed on the docket sheet*. Note that joint debtors don't always receive mail at the same address. If the debtors have submitted a change of address form, you are required to serve the debtors at the address on file at the time your motion is filed.
- If your motion requires service on a *corporation or insured depository institution*, note that service under Rule 7004 often requires that the motion be sent to the attention of an officer or agent and sometimes by certified mail. See Judge Michael's Policy Regarding Proper Service on Corporations and Banks for more information.
- When preparing your mailing labels, there is no reason to re-type all of the creditors' addresses. If you re-type an address incorrectly, your notice is likely to be defective. You are encouraged to use the official mailing Matrix to provide the names and addresses of parties served—the .pdf is formatted for easy label printing! When you file your Certificate of Service, it is not enough to simply state that a motion was served "to all parties on the official mailing Matrix on file in this case." Local Rule 5005-1(E)(2) requires that you *list names and addresses in a Certificate of Service for all parties not receiving notice from the ECF System*. That means you can attach a .pdf copy of the Matrix to your Certificate of Service. Remember, when you tell us that a copy of the Matrix is attached, be sure that it is actually attached. Also, make sure to use a **current** mailing matrix, not one that is weeks or months old. The matrix for a case is updated every time someone enters an appearance or files a claim.

3. Get the dates right:

- Logically, we all know that you can't serve a file-stamped copy of your motion before the motion has been filed. Therefore, your certificate of service can't be dated before the date of filing your motion. If it is, we have to deny your motion for defective service.
- Along the same lines, the Court wants to know that you *have served* the motion, not that you *plan to do it* tomorrow (remember, "the best laid plans of mice and men . . ."). A certificate of service that shows service will take place on a date after the certificate is filed is defective and will cause your motion to be denied.
- Keep in mind that compliance with this Court's local rules requires that a file-stamped copy of your motion be *served on all parties in interest within 2 days of the filing date*. Bankr. N.D. Okla. LR 9013-1(G)(2). With the advent of electronic filing, this should not be a problem, as you get a copy of your pleading (and the electronic file stamp) immediately upon the filing of the pleading.

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