What to Expect: A Bankruptcy Timeline

Every case is unique, but most bankruptcies follow a predictable path. This timeline gives you a general idea of what happens, when it happens, and what's expected of you along the way.

STEP 1: INITIAL CONSULTATION (DAY 1)

What happens

- You meet with your attorney (in person, by phone, or virtually)
- Your financial situation is reviewed
- Chapter 7 vs. Chapter 13 is discussed
- You ask questions and get honest guidance

What you'll need

- Basic income and debt information
- Recent financial concerns (lawsuits, garnishments, foreclosure notices)

Goal: Decide if bankruptcy is the right solution and which chapter fits best.

STEP 2: DOCUMENT GATHERING & PREPARATION (1–3 WEEKS)

What happens

- You provide required documents (pay stubs, tax returns, bank statements, etc.)
- Your attorney prepares your bankruptcy petition and schedules
- Exemptions are carefully applied to protect assets

Your role

- Gather documents promptly
- Review drafts for accuracy
- Ask questions before filing

Goal: Build a complete, accurate case that protects you and avoids delays.

STEP 3: DOCUMENT GATHERING & PREPARATION (1–3 WEEKS)

What happens

- Your case is officially filed with the court
- The automatic stay begins immediately

What the automatic stay does

- Stops creditor calls
- Halts wage garnishments
- Pauses foreclosures, repossessions, and lawsuits

Goal: Give you immediate breathing room and legal protection.

STEP 4: TRUSTEE ASSIGNMENT & CASE REVIEW (1–3 WEEKS AFTER FILING)

What happens

- A bankruptcy trustee is assigned
- Your paperwork is reviewed for completeness and accuracy

What this means for you

- Most cases proceed smoothly
- Your attorney handles trustee communication
- You'll be notified if anything additional is needed

Goal: Ensure the case is compliant and ready for the next step.

STEP 5: 341 MEETING OF CREDITORS (ABOUT 30–45 DAYS AFTER FILING)

What happens

- A short, informal meeting (usually virtual)
- The trustee asks basic questions about your paperwork
- Creditors may attend, but usually do not

What it's like

- Typically lasts 5–10 minutes
- No courtroom, no judge
- Your attorney attends with you

Goal: Confirm the accuracy of your case and move it toward completion.

STEP 6: FINANCIAL EDUCATION COURSE (BEFORE DISCHARGE)

What happens

- You complete a required debtor education course online
- It focuses on budgeting and financial management

Good news

- It's straightforward
- Takes about 1–2 hours
- Your attorney provides approved options

Goal: Satisfy a legal requirement so your case can close properly.

STEP 7: DISCHARGE OR PLAN CONFIRMATION

Chapter 7 (About 3–4 Months Total)

- Most unsecured debts are discharged
- Case closes shortly after
- You can begin rebuilding financially

Chapter 13 (3–5 Year Plan)

- Monthly plan payments begin
- Court confirms your repayment plan
- Debts are discharged after successful completion

Goal: Achieve debt relief and a clear financial path forward.

STEP 8: LIFE AFTER BANKRUPTCY

What happens next

- Creditor activity ends permanently on discharged debts
- Credit rebuilding can begin sooner than many expect
- Your attorney remains available for post-case questions

Many clients find

- Stress decreases significantly
- Budgeting becomes manageable
- Financial goals feel achievable again

A Reassuring Note

Bankruptcy is not a single stressful moment, it's a process with clear steps and protections built in. Your attorney's role is to guide you, handle the legal details, and make sure there are no surprises along the way.