



Nebraska State Bar Association

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**The Nebraska State Bar Association awarded \$15,000 for Clerkship Program in Rural Nebraska**

Currently, across Nebraska's 93 counties, there are 12 counties without an attorney and 22 others with 3 or fewer attorneys. The NSBA hears from attorneys in rural Nebraska, that they would like to retire but their clients won't let them. We hear that they would hire someone tomorrow, if the right person walked into the door—but no one is walking in the door. As Howard Olsen, past president of the NSBA says "Twenty years ago, Chadron had 10 lawyers; Alliance had a dozen and now each just has two or three". Mr. Olsen said that clients in rural Nebraska who used to find a lawyer across the street may now drive "50, 60, sometimes 100 miles" to find one. Map of Attorneys by County

In 2013, the NSBA established its Rural Practice Initiative. The primary objective of the Initiative is to increase the number of attorneys (recent law graduates) practicing in underserved rural communities. As NSBA President G. Michael Fenner explains, this effort is not solely for the benefit of the students: "Attracting new graduates to rural areas is essential in ensuring access to legal services across the state, to keeping courthouses in rural communities open, and to providing future leaders for many of these areas."

One of the primary ways in which this objective can be met is to expose law students to the practice of law in rural communities. To that end, the NSBA has just received a \$15,000 grant from the American Bar Association that will allow the NSBA to expand the number of clerkship opportunities made available to law students in rural areas in two ways. First by, increasing the number of rural law firms that participate; and second, by making these clerkship opportunities more affordable for students by helping them secure temporary housing in rural communities.

The NSBA has realized that a part of the answer to the lack of lawyers in Greater Nebraska is to get law students out there so they can see the kind of law practice they can have, so that they can see the quality of life, the quality of the schools and the medical care, the availability of low cost housing, the opportunities for their spouses. As President Fenner explains, "Graduating law students are like jurors: you must show them. You can tell them how great rural life and practice is until you are blue in the face. But you won't convince them until you show them." The Rural Practice Initiative shows them.

Funds through the American Bar Association's Legal Access Catalyst Grant Program will be used in two ways. First, the NSBA will recruit ten new law firms to participate in the Summer Clerkship Program. The grant will allow the NSBA to provide a financial incentive for law firms to participate by making funds available to help offset some of the costs of taking on a summer law clerk. Priority will be given to firms in communities with the most disparate ratio of attorneys to county residents ([see map of distribution of active attorneys in Nebraska](#)).

Second, the NSBA will provide the student law-clerks a modest housing stipend. One of the challenges of placing law students in summer clerkships in rural Nebraska has been securing housing. Relocating to a rural area for a clerkship can be cost prohibitive for many law students.

The NSBA believes that getting more firms to participate in the Rural Practice Initiative will demonstrate the value of the program and will encourage their continued participation beyond the grant period. And getting students to participate will show them the value of a rural practice. The more successful the program is in placing summer law clerks, the more likely additional firms and students will want to participate.