Legal Deserts: A Multi-State Perspective on Rural Access to Justice

Lisa R. Pruitt,* Amanda L. Kool,† Lauren Sudeall Lucas,‡ Michele Statz,§ Danielle M. Conway,∥ and Hannah Haksgaardβ

Abstract

Rural America faces an increasingly dire access to justice crisis, which serves to exacerbate the already disproportionate share of social problems afflicting rural areas. One critical aspect of that crisis is the dearth of information and research regarding the extent of the problem and its impacts. This article begins to address that gap by providing surveys of rural access to justice in six geographically, demographically, and economically varied states: California, Georgia, Maine, Minnesota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. In addition to providing insights about the distinct rural challenges confronting each of these states, the legal resources available, and existing policy responses, the article explores common themes that emerge through this multi-state lens, thus framing a richer, broader discussion of rural access to justice, with particular attention to the rural attorney shortage.

The article ultimately proposes a two-step approach toward closing the rural justice gap. First, although the information presented here provides a solid foundation, a critical need remains for ongoing careful and thoughtful study of the legal needs and lack of legal resources in rural areas. Second, the unique institutional, structural, and demographic characteristics of rural areas will require tailored, innovative, and data-driven solutions to match appropriate legal services with needs. Our hope is that this article will inform and expand access-to-justice conversations to more intentionally address the legal needs of the rural population.

* Martin Luther King, Jr., Professor of Law, University of California, Davis. Thanks to Anujan Jeevaprakash, Casey Pruitt convened this group to offer a comparative perspective on the rural access-to-justice lawscape across different regions, and she wrote the section on California. Each author drafted her own state(s) section, and Amanda L. Kool and Lisa Pruitt wrote the analysis comparing the states and the proposal of a new approach. Authors are listed in the byline in order of their contributions.

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‡ Associate Professor and Faculty Director, Center for Access to Justice, Georgia State University College of Law. I am grateful for the contributions of Bryan Janflone and Darcy Meals and to the State Bar of Georgia for providing data on lawyers across the state. Much credit is due to Timur Selimovic, who provided significant assistance in researching and writing this section of the Article, and to the students in GSU Law’s Access to Justice: Law Reform course who provided helpful input as well.

§ Anthropologist of law and Assistant Professor, Department of Family Medicine and Biobehavioral Health, University of Minnesota Medical School, Duluth. The research on which this portion is based is part of a three-year qualitative study on rural access to justice across northern Minnesota and Wisconsin. It is funded by the National Science Foundation Law and Social Science Program, award no. 1729117.

∥ Dean & Professor of Law, University of Maine School of Law (Maine Law). I would like to recognize my colleague, Rachel Reeves, Esq., who serves as Director of Field Placement Programs at Maine Law for her extraordinary efforts in championing the need to make legal services accessible and affordable to citizens and residents living in rural Maine. Ms. Reeves served on the Board of Overseers of the Bar’s Task Force to Study Bar Demographics as well as Maine Law’s planning committee that launched the Maine Law School Rural Lawyer Program.

β Assistant Professor of Law, University of South Dakota School of Law. I would like to thank the many members of the South Dakota legal community who gave their valuable time to share their experiences and expertise with me. In particular, I thank Chief Justice David Gilbertson for granting me an in-person interview and Kelsea Kenzy Sutton for reading an early draft of this manuscript.
vast rural reaches of our nation, thus furthering the ultimate goal of realizing access to justice for all Americans.

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II. THEMES AMONG STATES SURVEYED
INTRODUCTION

Rural America is frequently discussed as a single, homogeneous region, framed primarily as a counterpoint to America’s cities. In fact, our country’s vast rural areas feature cultural, geographic, racial, ethnic, political, and economic diversity that is too rarely recognized and less often discussed. So long as rural life and its challenges are overgeneralized in public discourse, we lose collective awareness of the diversity of our nation’s rural experiences. As a consequence, policies seeking to respond to rural needs may fail to address the full spectrum of issues at play.

In spite of the diversity among rural people and places, the rural experience does pose some common challenges. Unfortunately, many contemporary rural commonalities are best characterized as social problems. Compared to our nation’s metropolitan areas, rural America suffers...
disproportionately from poverty, poor health outcomes, the opioid epidemic, educational deficits, and environmental degradation, among other challenges. These problems are clearly interconnected: the less money a person has, the less likely she is to have access to healthcare and thus the more likely she is to suffer poor health outcomes; a person with poor health is less likely to achieve educational milestones or remain gainfully employed; and so forth.

Pervasive rural social problems are also clearly interconnected with law, justice systems, and—by extension—lawyers. The 2017 Justice Gap Report by the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) gave special attention to rural Americans as a distinctly vulnerable population that merited analysis, along with a number of other highly vulnerable populations: seniors over age 65, veterans, persons with disabilities, parents/guardians of children under 18, and survivors of domestic violence/sexual assault. The Report estimated that 10 million rural Americans have incomes below 125% of the federal poverty line and therefore are eligible for LSC-funded services. The Report also found that three-quarters of America’s low-income rural residents faced at least one civil legal problem in a year, while nearly a quarter of rural residents experienced six or more civil legal problems in a year. Yet only 14% of rural residents received adequate assistance for their civil legal problems, a rate less than half the national average. The same Report lists the three most common types of civil legal problems faced by low-income rural residents: health; consumer and finance; and employment issues. These categories closely track the disproportionately rural problems outlined above.


7 “Rural counties have seen a disproportionate jump in deaths from prescription-drug overdoses in the past 15 years, increasing at a pace three times that of the nation’s most urban counties.” Tim Marema, Prescription Drug-Death Rate Grows Fastest in Rural, The DAILY YONDER (Aug. 9, 2016) http://www.dailyyonder.com/prescription-drug-death-rate-grows-fastest-in-rural/2016/08/09/14662/ [https://perma.cc/EL3K-29M3]. See also RURAL AMERICA AT A GLANCE, supra note 3, at 3.


9 See, e.g., Loka Ashwood & Kate MacTavish, Tyranny of the majority and rural environmental injustice, 47 J. RURAL STUD. 271 (2016).


12 Id. at 19.

13 Id. at 21.

14 Id. at 13 (reporting a national average of 28% to 38% of low-income residents receiving assistance).

15 Id. at 48.

16 Id. See supra notes [7–11] and accompanying text. One consequence of a lack of lawyers to meet rural legal needs is an increase in pro se litigants. While available statistics on pro se litigants do not focus on rural areas specifically, the state-level data is still compelling: in 2016, nearly 80% of cases heard in Minnesota’s district courts involved at least one pro se litigant. See Hannah Covington, Minnesota courts work to keep up with do-it-yourself demand, STARTRIBUNE (Apr. 3, 2017,
Rural residents do not fare any better when it comes to adequate representation in criminal matters. A report by the Vera Institute recently found that a shortage of defense counsel, along with other justice system deficits, was driving an increase in rural jail populations, which in turn were driving up national incarceration rates. Despite rural areas’ relatively low crime rates, incarceration rates in rural jails rose 436% between 1970 and 2013, even as they declined in urban areas.

While many of the legal needs of rural residents’ track those of their urban counterparts, rural living does increase the likelihood of certain types of legal challenges. As detailed by Lisa Pruitt and Bradley Showman in Law Stretched Thin: Access to Justice in Rural America (2014):

The material spatiality that defines rural living also masks social problems, many with legal implications. Migrant farm workers and other rural residents endure substandard housing and abusive working conditions. The elderly, disabled, and veterans—all disproportionately represented in rural America—need a wide array of supports. The access to justice challenge for American Indians, who face myriad social ailments and disproportionately high poverty rates, is aggravated by the byzantine tapestry of state, federal, and tribal laws that form the backdrop to their lives. And rural places are increasingly the dumping ground for externalities associated with extractive industries and with all sorts of environmental hazards cast off by metropolitan areas. All of these implicate legal issues.

16 See KANG-BROWN & SUBRAMANIAN, supra note [16].
17 See id. at 7, 13. The other reason for the rise in rural jails is outside jurisdictions, including state prisons and Immigration and Customs Enforcement. See Lisa R. Pruitt, Rural prison building boom evolves into rural jail expansion boom? LEGAL RURALISM BLOG (Sept. 6, 2016), http://legalruralism.blogspot.com/2016/09/rural-prison-building-boom-evolves-into.html; Lisa R. Pruitt, Low-population counties sending people to prison at higher rates than cities, LEGAL RURALISM BLOG (Sept. 4, 2016).

If a lack of rural lawyers results in a disproportionate percentage of rural legal issues going unaddressed, then these already-disproportionate rural social problems will be compounded. This is a problem at both the individual level—meaning not enough lawyers or other forms of legal assistance are available to support the legal services needs of individuals—and at the policy level, where lawmakers might better understand how rural problems and their solutions differ from those in urban areas. Adequately addressing legal issues at both the individual and policy levels requires not only lawyers who know the salient substantive area(s) of law, but lawyers who are also culturally competent to be effective in the communities in which these problems persist. As expressed in a *New York Times* article discussing an initiative to educate more would-be lawyers and legal assistants in rural India, “We can always teach them the law . . . [w]e can’t teach them to be from here.”

Despite the immense need for lawyers in rural America, the number of attorneys practicing in rural areas falls painfully short. While about twenty percent of our nation’s population lives in rural America, only two percent of our nation’s small law practices are located there. The number of registered “active” attorneys in any location likely overstates the resources available in that area, as at any given time an untold number of those attorneys might be employed by government entities, working in non-legal jobs, functionally retired, not practicing law in an area of expertise needed by prospective clients, or otherwise not actually able to redress the legal needs of the local population. Rural residents who seek access to existing lawyers and courts often must overcome additional challenges related to distance and transportation, the promise of technology, the role of legal education, the need for more and better data, and the need for “tailored and multi-faceted responses . . . rather than ‘blanket’ solutions.” *Id.* at 2-4.

While most if not all of the examples of rural legal needs mentioned involve remedial actions to redress grievances, a dearth of transactional attorneys in rural areas limits to the ability of individuals and communities to achieve economic independence and prosperity, thereby increasing the likelihood of remedial legal needs. This is implicitly recognized in the South Dakota incentive program, which acknowledges all that attorneys bring to rural communities, including human capital. See generally *The Comprehensive Rural Wealth Framework,* supra note 9.

which also draws many conclusions similar to our own. These include diversity among rural areas; the multi-faceted nature of legal problems facing rural residents; lack of other services aggravating the inability of rural residents to access legal services; challenges related to distance and transportation, the promise of technology, the role of legal education, the need for more and better data, and the need for “tailored and multi-faceted responses . . . rather than ‘blanket’ solutions.” *Id.* at 2-4.

While most if not all of the examples of rural legal needs mentioned involve remedial actions to redress grievances, a dearth of transactional attorneys in rural areas limits to the ability of individuals and communities to achieve economic independence and prosperity, thereby increasing the likelihood of remedial legal needs. This is implicitly recognized in the South Dakota incentive program, which acknowledges all that attorneys bring to rural communities, including human capital. See generally *The Comprehensive Rural Wealth Framework,* supra note 9.


barriers, including vast distances, insufficient (or nonexistent) public transit, and lack of reliable communication tools, including cell phone service and broadband Internet.

As a further consequence of so many barriers to access, individuals who live in areas without adequate or accessible legal representation may fail to know their legal rights or to recognize that legal recourse may be available for a particular problem. As Robin Runge summarized in a 2014 article:

The lack of access to information and enforcement of legal rights in rural communities has significant repercussions, including possibly violating state and federal law. It means people with disabilities go without access to public benefits or employment. Without adequate access to legal assistance, individuals living in rural areas face risk of eviction . . . and victims of domestic violence are at greater risk of serious injury . . . Research has indicated that in situations where there is a known lack of access to justice, those in positions of power use the lack of a rule of law to exploit vulnerable populations.

In other words, a lack of access to justice can evolve into a greater and entrenched lack of agency in one’s life, effectively snowballing to become much larger than the original unaddressed legal issue(s).

When these many barriers to access are considered in the aggregate, the immensity and complexity of a rural access-to-justice crisis begins to come into focus. As a reflection of these immense challenges facing many rural people, data regarding the dearth of lawyers in many rural communities—and the complete absence of them from others—are cause for alarm. More alarming still is all that we do not know. Relatively little data has been collected about the access to justice

25 See generally Michele Statt & Lisa R. Pruitt, To Recognize the Tyranny of Distance: A Spatial Reading of Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstedt, ENV’T & PLANNING A: ECON. & SPACE (forthcoming 2018) (elaborating on distance as a feature of rural life and when it has and has not been recognized as such by courts). “Urban areas make up only 3 percent of the entire land area of the country but are home to more than 80 percent of the population. Conversely, 97 percent of the country’s land mass is rural but only 19.3 percent of the population lives there.” One in Five Americans Live in Rural Areas, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (Aug. 2017), https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2017/08/rural-america.html [https://perma.cc/H72M-3H9X].

26 According to a 2004 analysis, 60 percent of rural counties have access to public transit, including 28 percent of rural counties with only limited access; this means 40 percent of rural residents have no access to public transit. Dennis Brown & Eileen Stommes, Rural Governments Face Public Transportation Challenges and Opportunities, U.S. DEP’T AGRIC., ECON. RESEARCH SERV. (Feb. 1, 2004), https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2004/february/rural-governments-face-public-transportation-challenges-and-opportunities/ [https://perma.cc/32JW-X2DP].

27 See, e.g., Jennifer Levitz & Valerie Bauerlein, Rural America is Stranded in the Dial-Up Age, WALL ST. J. (June 15, 2017), https://www.wsj.com/articles/rural-america-is-stranded-in-the-dial-up-age-1497535841 [https://perma.cc/EGT2-UBUQ] (reporting that 39% of rural Americans—23 million people—lack access to broadband, compared to just 4% of urban residents). Many people without internet access rely on their smartphones for access to the internet, which poses problems when data is limited or websites are not formatted for mobile readability. See, e.g., Linda Boon, Could You Live Entirely on Mobile Internet? Try It for a Day, CITYLAB (May 21, 2018), https://www.citylab.com/equity/2018/01/mobile-only-challenge-fcc-broadband-definition/550202/ (reporting that 23 million Americans rely on their smartphones as their only avenue to the internet and highlighting the limitations of smartphone-only internet access, including phone storage capacity, data limits, and functionality for typing or running certain programs). Even cell phone service as a means to rural internet connectivity is not a given, and in some cases is being taken away. Last year, Verizon sent termination letters to hundreds of rural residents across the country, terminating their coverage and citing an abundance of roaming charges on their accounts as the reason. See Kristen Inbody, Verizon’s nixing some cell service in rural Montana has locals scared about emergencies, USA TODAY (Sept. 17, 2017, 1:54 PM), https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2017/09/17/verizons-nixing-some-cell-service-rural-montana-has-locals-scared-emergencies/674986001/ [https://perma.cc/9S36-HMCH].


30 This issue is not new; the need for data on the legal needs of the rural poor was discussed in a Duke University study from nearly 50 years ago, in which a survey study was conducted in one North Carolina county in order to investigate “the kinds of problems, methods of resolution, utilization of services and the perception of legal or other remedies common to the rural poverty group.” Many of the sentiments of that article and findings of the survey study still ring true today. See generally Legal Problems of the Rural Poor, 3 DUKE L.J. 495 (1969).
crisis in rural America,\textsuperscript{31} which means that rare attempts to address the problem have sometimes been devised in response to scant or vague evidence.

One goal of this article is to provide a body of state-specific data, to the extent such data are available, to foster a better understanding of rural access to justice challenges. We also look at policy interventions in the surveyed states. Our primary goal, however, is to provide such data and perspectives across a range of states so that a more comprehensive understanding of rural access to justice is achieved through this multi-state comparison. In turn, these data can inform remediation strategies designed to ameliorate the barriers to justice we identify.

Admittedly, the value of our state surveys for comparative purposes is somewhat limited by state-to-state inconsistencies among the data available and our varied means of collecting it. One particular complication to our analysis is that multiple definitions of “rural” are employed across the various and specific states and data we survey. In short, the federal government supports two main definitions of “rural,” as well as many lesser-known, less-used variants.\textsuperscript{32} One of those definitions of “rural” comes from the U.S. Census Bureau\textsuperscript{33} while the other (“nonmetro,” which is a county-level designation often used synonymously with “rural”) is promulgated by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).\textsuperscript{34} The inconsistencies between these two definitions are staggering: in fact, a large portion of the rural population as defined by the Census Bureau actually falls outside of nonmetro counties.\textsuperscript{35} That is, many “rural” places are within metropolitan counties.

The United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS),\textsuperscript{36} which analyzes and publishes a great deal of rural data, frequently employs the arguably under-inclusive\textsuperscript{37} OMB definition of “nonmetro.”\textsuperscript{38} This means that the rural problems being studied and written about may be even more widespread than some data and analysis suggest.\textsuperscript{39} Moreover,  

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31} Pruitt & Showman, supra note 19, at 466, 494. B\textsuperscript{u}t see The JUSTICE GAP, supra note 9.
\item \textsuperscript{33} The U.S. Census Bureau defines rural as “any population, housing, or territory not in an urban area.” See How Does the U.S. Census Bureau Define Rural?, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, https://storymaps.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=9e459da9327bfe4e7e1248cb65a9d42a [https://perma.cc/TT9C-J6JF]. Rural journalist Bill Bishop combines the populations of “unincorporated areas” and “urban clusters” (which are small cities of 2,500 to 50,000 people), as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, to capture the population considered “rural.” See Bill Bishop, The States of Rural America, THE DAILY YONDER (Apr. 3, 2012), http://www.dailyyonder.com/how-rural-are-states/2012/04/03/3847/ [https://perma.cc/QX5H-UQ89].
\item \textsuperscript{34} See U.S. Census Bureau, supra note 33.
\item \textsuperscript{35} See id. “‘Nonmetro’ is not synonymous with rural. Metropolitan Statistical Areas or ‘metro’ areas are defined at the county level, and most counties have a mix of urban and rural areas. In fact, according to the latest American Community Survey (ACS), 54.4 percent of people living in rural areas are within a metro area.” How Does the U.S. Census Bureau Define Rural?, supra note 33.
\item \textsuperscript{36} “ERS researchers and others who analyze conditions in ‘rural’ America most often use data on nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) areas.” What is Rural?, U.S. DEP’T AGRIC., ECON. RESEARCH SERV., https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-classifications/what-is-rural.aspx (last updated May 1, 2017) [https://perma.cc/AE8T-GXG5].
\item \textsuperscript{37} There are measurement challenges with both the Census and OMB definitions. Some policy experts note that the Census definition classifies quite a bit of suburban area as rural. The OMB definition includes rural areas in Metropolitan counties including, for example, the Grand Canyon which is located in a Metro county. Consequently, one could argue that the Census Bureau standard includes an over-count of the rural population whereas the OMB standard represents an undercount.” Defining Rural Population, supra note 33.
\item \textsuperscript{38} There are measurement challenges with both the Census and OMB definitions. Some policy experts note that the Census definition classifies quite a bit of suburban area as rural. The OMB definition includes rural areas in Metropolitan counties including, for example, the Grand Canyon which is located in a Metro county. Consequently, one could argue that the Census Bureau standard includes an over-count of the rural population whereas the OMB standard represents an undercount.” Supra note [19] (last visited Jan. 16, 2018). See also U.S.DEP’T AGRIC., ECON. RESEARCH SERV., RURAL AMERICA AT A GLANCE (reporting that the amount of rural territory within metropolitan counties has increased in recent decades); Daniel T. Lichter and James P. Ziliak, The Rural-Urban Interface: New Patterns of Spatial Interdependence and Inequality in America 672 ANNALS AAPSS 6, 8-9 (July 2017) (citing Wunderlich 2015).
\item \textsuperscript{39} See William P. O’Hare, 2020 Census Face Challenges in Rural America, U. N.H., CARESSY SCHOOL PUB. POL’Y (Winter 2017) (noting particular challenges to the 2020 census count in rural areas, including reliance on the Internet and technology in areas that are under-resourced in those areas).  
\end{itemize}
because these “rural” definitions matter for purposes of eligibility for various federal grants and programs.\textsuperscript{40} Inconsistencies and undercounting have direct and material consequences for residents of these areas.\textsuperscript{41}

To a great extent, our state profiles rely on data compiled by the individual states. This means that the definitions and standards of “rural” used throughout the article vary depending on the source of the data, sometimes resulting in the use of different definitions and standards for “rural,” even within an individual state survey. As a result, we attempt to specify the source and to cite, whenever possible, the standard employed. We recognize, however, that the statistics and qualitative data we have at our disposal do not tell the whole story.

Further, while much of our data, as well as our discussion, are at the scale of the county, we recognize that the county is not necessarily the optimal unit of analysis.\textsuperscript{42} For instance, counties vary enormously in size, with counties in Western states typically far larger than those in Eastern states. The average size of one of California’s 58 counties is 2,822 square miles, while the average size of a Georgia county is just 374 square miles. [Table 7.] Even within a given state, county size can vary enormously. Maine’s largest county, Aroostook, is 6,671 square miles and thus on par with some of California’s largest counties, but its smallest county, Sagadahoc, is only 254 square miles.\textsuperscript{43} In South Dakota, Pennington County is so vast, stretching 100 miles from east to west, that officials have re-visited the parameters of the state’s Rural Attorney Recruitment Program to account for the fact that attorneys are clustered at one end of the county,\textsuperscript{44} leaving the other end an attorney desert. Of course, lawyers cross county boundaries while practicing law, but doing so can result in increased costs for clients.

“Rural” is not the only term used in various ways by government entities and across scholarly literature from a range of disciplines. Although the access to justice crisis in rural America extends to a need for lawyers who represent clients of various income levels, most of the data and analysis we offer relates to the “poor,” a term which is arguably as hard to define as “rural.” The federal government defines “poverty” based on income thresholds that take into account family size and composition when evaluating household income.\textsuperscript{45} LSC limits eligibility to individuals who

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\caption{Distribution of income levels in various rural areas.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{40} What Is Rural?, RURAL HEALTH INFO. Hub, https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/what-is-rural/why-definitions [https://perma.cc/3XG7-3D95].
\textsuperscript{41} Id.
\textsuperscript{42} County-level metrics on attorney presence presume that that people will seek a lawyer near them, which is not always the case. See Jamie Baxter & Albert Yoon, No Lawyer for a Hundred Miles: Mapping the New Geography of Access to Justice in Canada, 52 OSGOODE HALL L.J. 9 (2014). It is important to remember, however, that rural people—especially low-income rural people—may not have the means to travel any considerable distance to meet with a lawyer or, indeed, get to court.
\textsuperscript{43} Indeed, Aroostook competes with St. Louis County, Minnesota—home of Duluth and part of Minnesota’s northland—for the largest county east of the Mississippi. See Quick Facts: St. Louis County, Minnesota; Aroostook County, Maine, U.S. Census Bureau (2010), https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/stlouiscountyminnesota,aroostookcountymaine,US/LND110210.
\textsuperscript{44} See infra Part I.E.2.
\textsuperscript{45} How the Census Bureau Measures Poverty, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (Aug. 11, 2017), https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/poverty/guidance/poverty-measures.html The way we measure poverty nationally has historically been through a calculation known as the “official poverty rate,” which was developed in 1963 and is based on a 1955 study indicating that a family of three or larger spent one-third of their after-tax income on food. This metric, only updated annually for inflation since originally created, has been largely supplanted by the Supplemental Poverty Measure, which takes into account cash as well as non-cash benefits (the latter including benefits such as food stamps and subsidized school lunches and housing assistance), taxes, and the subtraction of other necessary life expenses, with an adjustment for cost of living based on region. See, e.g., Francine Lipman, (Anti)Poverty Measures Exposed, 21 FLA. TAX REV. 389, 398-401, 416-19 (2017); Anupama Jacob, The Supplemental Poverty Measure: A Better Measure for Poverty in America?, CENTER FOR POVERTY RESEARCH-UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS, https://poverty.ucdavis.edu/policy-brief/supplemental-poverty-measure-better-measure-poverty-america (last visited Apr. 22, 2018); Joseph Dalaker, An Introduction to Poverty Measurement, CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE, https://maximinlaw.wordpress.com/2018/04/19/crs-report-an-introduction-to-poverty-measurement-2017/ (last visited April 22, 2018).
fall beneath 125% of the federal poverty guidelines. As with the term “rural,” the data we present use varying thresholds for who is deemed “poor,” as well as for who is considered “modest means,” “low-income,” the “working poor,” “income eligible,” and “indigent,” depending on the state and data specified. Again, we attempt to provide definitions where these terms have been quantified and/or defined.

Notwithstanding a lack of consistent and reliable data regarding rural access to justice—and in some ways because of it—this article surveys current access to justice issues, challenges, and strategies in the rural areas of several states, representing geographic diversity spanning from West Coast to the East Coast, and from the Deep South to the Canadian border. These states were chosen for their spatial, economic, and population variations. Just as significantly, we chose them because we knew of efforts underway in these states to study and address rural issues. We ordered the state surveys from least rural state to most rural state as defined by USDA ERS state-level data, with the threshold between rural and urban being population clusters of 2,500 people. By that metric, using 2016 data (the most recent USDA ERS has used for this calculation), California is 2.1% rural; Georgia, 17.2%; Minnesota, 22.4%; Wisconsin, 25.9%; Maine, 40.8%; and South Dakota, 51.9% rural.

### Table 1: Rural Population by State (2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>California</th>
<th>Georgia</th>
<th>Minnesota</th>
<th>Wisconsin</th>
<th>Maine</th>
<th>South Dakota</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>832,574</td>
<td>1,778,123</td>
<td>1,237,572</td>
<td>1,499,467</td>
<td>542,697</td>
<td>449,130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>38,417,443</td>
<td>8,532,248</td>
<td>4,282,380</td>
<td>4,279,241</td>
<td>788,782</td>
<td>416,324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>97.9%</td>
<td>82.8%</td>
<td>77.6%</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
<td>59.2%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39,250,017</td>
<td>10,310,371</td>
<td>5,519,952</td>
<td>5,778,708</td>
<td>1,331,479</td>
<td>865,454</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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47 By way of example, the Report, Improving Civil Justice in Rural California referred to indigent populations, as well as to low-income, modest-means and LSC-eligible populations. Improving Civil Justice in Rural California, supra infra note [ ] , at 7-9. The California attorney data analyzed below considered those living below the poverty line, those living at 200% of poverty line, and those aged 65 and older. Meeker Data, infra note [ ] .

48 Because the surveys of Minnesota and Wisconsin were written by the same author and are heavily compared and contrasted, those two regions are clustered together in one section.


50 The rural socioeconomic and spatial landscapes of northeastern Minnesota and northern Wisconsin largely resemble one another more prominently than they do their respective states’ metropolitan and southern (and in the case of Minnesota, western) areas. Looking at this region as a whole allows us to comparatively evaluate how state political structures and funding mechanisms, attorney and judge shortages, the greying bar, and area law schools variously impact rural access to justice.

51 Table 1 (citing to USDA ERS State Profiles; full cite embedded in Table).
### Table 2: Lawyer Presence by State (2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>California</th>
<th>Georgia</th>
<th>Minnesota</th>
<th>Wisconsin</th>
<th>Maine</th>
<th>South Dakota</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Population</strong></td>
<td>39,250,017</td>
<td>10,310,371</td>
<td>5,519,952</td>
<td>5,778,708</td>
<td>1,331,479</td>
<td>865,454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Housing Units</strong></td>
<td>13,911,737</td>
<td>4,156,518</td>
<td>2,382,855</td>
<td>2,649,597</td>
<td>727,127</td>
<td>375,866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Active Lawyers</strong></td>
<td>167,690</td>
<td>31,499</td>
<td>24,952</td>
<td>15,072</td>
<td>3,931</td>
<td>1,960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Households per Lawyer</strong></td>
<td>83</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Residents per Lawyer</strong></td>
<td>234</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>442</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3: Rural and Poverty Rates by State (2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>California</th>
<th>Georgia</th>
<th>Minnesota</th>
<th>Wisconsin</th>
<th>Maine</th>
<th>South Dakota</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>State Avg.</strong></td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rural</strong></td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban</strong></td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Difference Between Rural and Urban</strong></td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>-0.6%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4: Rural and Urban Per-Capita Income by State (2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>California</th>
<th>Georgia</th>
<th>Minnesota</th>
<th>Wisconsin</th>
<th>Maine</th>
<th>South Dakota</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>State Average</strong></td>
<td>$56,374</td>
<td>$42,159</td>
<td>$52,038</td>
<td>$46,762</td>
<td>$44,053</td>
<td>$47,834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rural</strong></td>
<td>$44,673</td>
<td>$31,841</td>
<td>$43,460</td>
<td>$41,689</td>
<td>$40,306</td>
<td>$43,266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban</strong></td>
<td>$56,628</td>
<td>$44,310</td>
<td>$54,517</td>
<td>$48,540</td>
<td>$46,631</td>
<td>$52,762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Difference</strong></td>
<td>-$11,955</td>
<td>-$12,469</td>
<td>-$11,057</td>
<td>-$6,851</td>
<td>-$6,325</td>
<td>-$9,496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rural as a % of Urban</strong></td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 5: RURAL AND URBAN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE BY STATE (2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>California</th>
<th>Georgia</th>
<th>Minnesota</th>
<th>Wisconsin</th>
<th>Maine</th>
<th>South Dakota</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Avg.</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference Between Rural and Urban</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 6: RURAL AND URBAN EDUCATION LEVEL BY STATE (% OF PERSONS 25 AND OLDER) (2012-2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Completion</th>
<th>State Avg.</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not completing high school</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing high school only</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing some college</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing college</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
<td>-9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not completing high school</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing high school only</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing some college</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>-2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing college</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>-16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not completing high school</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing high school only</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing some college</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing college</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>-17.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not completing high school</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing high school only</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing some college</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing college</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>-11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not completing high school</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing high school only</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing some college</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing college</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
<td>-9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not completing high school</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing high school only</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing some college</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
<td>-2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing college</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>-5.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 7: COUNTY PROFILES WITHIN STATES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Counties*</th>
<th>Avg. Population per County*</th>
<th>Number of Counties with Population Below 10K*</th>
<th>Number of Counties with Population Below 50K*</th>
<th>Total State Area in Square Miles*</th>
<th>Avg. County Area in Square Miles*</th>
<th>Avg. Housing Units per County*</th>
<th>Avg. Density per Square Mile of Land Area*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>642,310</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>163,695</td>
<td>2,822</td>
<td>235,863</td>
<td>663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>60,929</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>59,425</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>45,114</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>60,965</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>86,934</td>
<td>999</td>
<td>26,979</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>78,986</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>65,496</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>25,716</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>83,023</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35,380</td>
<td>2,211</td>
<td>36,449</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>12,336</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>77,116</td>
<td>1,168</td>
<td>5,507</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each author has relied upon her own expertise, areas of interest, and available data to complete her state survey(s). We have drawn from many sources in compiling our work, including, at times, local media and in-person interviews. The richness of these qualitative data reflect another characteristic associated with rural America: the great value placed on interpersonal relationships. Such relationships can be a double-edged sword: a benefit when cultivated in the mentor-mentee interactions inherent in South Dakota’s Rural Attorney Recruitment Program, for example, but a challenge when attorneys must learn the idiosyncrasies of remote regional courts in northern Wisconsin in order to advocate effectively for their clients.

Part I of this article presents a survey of rural access to justice in the six states. Each state survey typically begins with a discussion of the state’s institutional framework and political landscape, followed by that state’s policy responses to rural justice deficits. Most of the state profiles then discuss the role that law schools play in addressing legal needs in the state’s rural areas. Table 8 provides data on law school tuition costs across the states surveyed, information that appears to be highly relevant to the rural lawyer shortage for reasons discussed below.

### TABLE 8: AVERAGE LAW SCHOOL TUITION PER YEAR, BY STATE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CA</th>
<th>GA</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>MN</th>
<th>WI</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Annual Law School Tuition at ABA-AALS Accredited Schools</td>
<td>$49,558</td>
<td>$29,608</td>
<td>$22,290</td>
<td>$35,331</td>
<td>$34,332</td>
<td>$15,688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Annual Law School Tuition at Cal-Accredited Law Schools</td>
<td>$21,903</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Annual Tuition at Unaccredited Schools: distance learning, fixed facility, and correspondence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part II explores some of the themes and commonalities that emerge from the collection of state surveys, including rural-urban disparities in legal aid funding; how race intersects with poverty and

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53 See infra Part I.C.2.a. (discussing the difficulties of non-local counsel practicing in Wisconsin’s northern counties).
access; rural attorney shortages, including specifically, the attrition of aging rural attorneys and the dearth of replacements; and measures states have taken to offset attrition. Though the most obvious metric for measuring rural access to justice is the number of attorneys who practice in a given area (and thus attorney numbers will be a topic of great discussion in this article), Part II examines common barriers to rural access beyond attorney shortages and surveys stakeholder efforts to increase rural access to legal services. That Part ends with a discussion of the implications of state politics for access to justice efforts.

In Part III, we introduce a new framework for addressing the rural access to justice crisis. The first piece of the framework relates to collecting and analyzing data about the needs and highlights the challenges associated with comparing data across states. Part III then discusses the need to carefully tailor rural access to justice initiatives to the settings in which they are to be deployed, as well as the importance of networking resources to respond to particular populations and legal needs. Part III also discusses the limits and promise of legal aid in rural settings. The final sections of Part III focus on ways in which a shifting legal market can be leveraged to create incentives for lawyers to enter rural practice, and it discusses the critical role of law schools in bridging rural-urban justice gaps. The article then concludes with reflections on the positive change that can result from a more thoughtful and tailored approach to realizing access to justice for rural Americans.

I. STATE SURVEYS

A. California

California, the most populous U.S. state with more than 35 million residents, is rarely thought of as rural. But California is not only populous; it is vast. The third largest state in the nation, California covers nearly 156,000 square miles. The state is divided into 58 counties with an average size that is twice as large as the entire state of Rhode Island. It should thus come as no surprise that rural pockets dot every region of the Golden State, with the central, far northern, and eastern parts in particular featuring considerable stretches that are sparsely populated. Drawing attention to the needs of rural residents—less than one million Californians under the U.S. Census Bureau definition—can be especially challenging in the context of an urban-centric population behemoth like California. Still, rural Californians outnumber the entire population of a few states and are almost as many as the entire population of South Dakota, for example. Clearly, their legal needs are worthy of attention.

California is already a “majority minority” state. Nearly 40% of the population is Latinx, and that population is about as well represented in rural places as in urban ones. In 2010, 36.4% of the state’s rural and small-town population was Latinx. Given this long-standing and high degree of

55 The average size of a California county is 2,822 square miles. Table 7. The executive summary of Improving Civil Justice in Rural California gave context to the state’s vastness and rurality by noting that if the 76% of the state’s land area—124,800 square miles—were its own state, it would be the fourth largest state in the nation. Cal. Comm’n on Access to Justice, Improving Civil Justice in Rural California 6 (Sept. 2010) [hereinafter Improving Civil Justice in Rural California], http://www.calbar.ca.gov/Portals/0/documents/accessJustice/CCAJ_2010_FINAL_2.pdf?ver=2017-05-19-133105-073 [https://perma.cc/JSX5-MCWE].
56 See Map 3; Table 9.
57 The rural population of California is 832,574. See Table 1.
58 See Table 1.
59 Quick Facts, supra note 59 (type “California” in search bar, select Population Estimates, July 1, 2016 from “Select a fact” menu, and select “Race and Hispanic Origin”). About 15% is Asian American; 6.5% is African American; and 3.8% self-identify as two or more races. Fewer than 38% identify as white alone. Id.
rural and ethnic diversity, California’s situation as a “gateway” state for immigration, and the population churn associated with agricultural labor, it should come as no surprise that the need for legal services related to immigration gets a great deal of attention in the access to justice sector, including among those focused on rural access.

But rural California is diverse beyond its well-known Latinx population: 2.5% of the state’s rural and small-town population are Asian; 2.6% are African American, and 2.2% are bi- or multi-racial. It is a little-known fact that more Native Americans (representing some 60 different tribes) live in California than in any other state. While they constitute just 1.5% of the state’s rural and small-town population, more than 63,000 California residents are Native American, and they often live in the state’s most remote reaches.

This California profile, the most reliant on quantitative data among the six state surveys, is devoted primarily to a discussion of where the state is experiencing attorney deserts. As a complement to that discussion, this survey reveals where the state’s lawyers are concentrated and hypothesizes some reasons for this dramatically uneven distribution. Before turning to that data, the next section considers California’s institutional framework related to access to justice, with particular attention to rural issues. Following the presentation of the attorney data is a discussion of the state’s meager policy interventions to date. Finally, this survey takes up California’s massive legal education sector, with particular attention to high tuition at ABA-AALS Accredited schools, high rates of law graduate debt, and the promise of so-called Cal-accredited law schools in addressing the rural lawyer shortage.

1. Institutional Framework and Political Landscape

In spite of California’s relatively small rural population, the state has been on the vanguard of awareness about access to justice in the rural context. In 2010, the California Commission on Access to Justice (CCATJ) published Improving Civil Justice in Rural California, a comprehensive 72-page report that quickly became a standard-bearer on the topic. The Commission’s Rural Access Task

[https://perma.cc/3SGZ-TPK2] (also reporting that Asian Americans are 2.6% of the rural and small-town population in California). The Housing Assistance Council designates three general classifications of housing density: 1. Small town and rural tracts (64 housing units per square mile and below); 2. Suburban and exurban tracts (65 to 1,600 housing units per square mile); and 3. Urban tracts (more than 1,600 housing units per square mile). See Defining Rural - Geographic Terms and Concepts, HOUSING ASSISTANCE COUNCIL: THE RURAL DATA PORTAL, http://www.rural dataportal.org/geot erms.aspx [https://perma.cc/3GNS-GCBN]. The Housing Assistance Council defines “rural and small towns” as areas with a low population density, small settlements, and a low level of racial and ethnic diversity. See RACE & ETHNICITY IN RURAL AMERICA, supra note 65, at 2.


63 See Pruitt & Williams, infra note 152. See also infra note [ ] (describing UCOP Central Valley Fellowship).

64 RACE & ETHNICITY IN RURAL AMERICA, supra note 60, at 10.

65 IMPROVING CIVIL JUSTICE IN RURAL CALIFORNIA, supra note 55, at 9.

66 RACE & ETHNICITY IN RURAL AMERICA, supra note 60, at 10.

67 IMPROVING CIVIL JUSTICE IN RURAL CALIFORNIA, supra note 55, at 9.

68 Id. at 6. This report was published under the leadership of Justice Ronald Robie, then chair of the Commission.
Force, which was responsible for drafting the publication, still operates as a standing committee of the CCAJT to study, draw awareness to, and advocate for better legal access for rural Californians. 69

The 2010 Report on Improving Civil Justice in Rural California asserted that “at least one third of low-income rural people need legal services for basic human needs.” 70 In a list not intended to be exhaustive, the Report enumerated seven legal issues facing low-income rural Californians: housing (including both foreclosures and migrant housing); labor violations; domestic violence; access to health care services; legal problems facing the elderly and persons with disabilities; language assistance; and tribal peoples. 71 One goal set by the Report was “statewide parity in funding” of legal aid and a “minimum level of access for every region of the state,” an issue revisited in Part I.a.iii. 72

Not surprisingly, the legal aid framework in California matches the state in terms of size and complexity. Ninety-seven legal aid organizations—including 75 that deliver direct legal services—shared a budget of more than $350 million in 2016. 73 At $45 million, Legal Services Corporation (LSC) funding is the single largest component of the budget. 74 Nevertheless, LSC monies are dwarfed by the aggregate contributions of a number of private foundations, which total about $80 million. 75

Law firms donated about $25 million, while individual lawyers donated an additional $14 million. 76 Numerous other sources comprise the remaining legal aid budget, including, for example, agricultural and disaster relief grants from both state and federal sources. 77

The State Bar of California has responsibility for distributing two significant funding streams: The Equal Access Fund (EAF) and the Interest Lawyer Trust Accounts (IOLTA) revenue from attorney trust accounts. The Equal Access Fund, currently $25 million, 78 includes about $5 million generated from filing fees and $20 million in general fund support from the California legislature. The latter flows through the judicial branch and then via the State Bar to legal aid organizations. 79 The State Bar also administers some $14 million in IOLTA funds. 80 Of those, only about $6 million is interest revenue. Another component of the IOLTA fund is The Justice Gap Fund, $1.3 million in

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71 Id. at 8–9.

72 Id. at 5. The Report added what could be considered a caveat in relation to parity: “Since no legal aid program has adequate resources, initiatives to address the severe lack of resources in rural areas should be pursued in a way that does not necessarily undermine urban legal programs.” Id.

73 Teleconference Interview with Salena Copeland, Exec. Dir. of Legal Aid Ass’n of Cal. (Mar. 16, 2018) [hereinafter Copeland Teleconference] (on file with Harvard Law School Library); E-mail from Salena Copeland, Exec. Dir., Legal Aid Ass’n of Cal., to Lisa R. Pruitt, Professor of Law, University of Cal., Davis (May 4, 2018 10:10 AM) [hereinafter Copeland E-mail 1] (on file with Harvard Law School Library); see also CALIFORNIA CIVIL LEGAL AID REVENUE SOURCES AND DISTRIBUTIONS (Oct. 10, 2017) (on file with Harvard Law Library) [hereinafter CAL. LEGAL AID REVENUE SOURCES AND DISTRIBUTIONS].

74 This includes $43.5 million in direct legal services and about $2 million in LSC grants for specific programs such as pro bono innovation and technology; see also CALIFORNIA CIVIL LEGAL AID REVENUE SOURCES AND DISTRIBUTIONS (Oct. 10, 2017) (on file with Harvard Law Library) [hereinafter CAL. LEGAL AID REVENUE SOURCES AND DISTRIBUTIONS].

75 Id.

76 Id.

77 Copeland Teleconference, supra note 78.

78 This includes $15 million in base funding plus $10 million in additional allocations in 2016, as well as in 2017. Copeland Teleconference, supra note 73. See also State Bar, legal aid groups strategize on funding for equal access, THE STATE BAR OF CAL. (Aug. 17, 2017), http://www.calbar.ca.gov/About-Us/News-Events/California-Bar-Journal/Articles/state-bar-legal-aid-groups-strategize-on-funding-for-equal-access [https://perma.cc/DB62-ATP5].


80 Copeland Teleconference, supra note 78.
2016 and comprised of individual contributions, residual funds, and cy pres. A major source of individual contributions is associated with collecting bar dues. Attorneys must “opt out” if they do not wish to make a $40 contribution when they pay their bar dues, and they can “opt in” to contribute an additional $100 to this fund.

Both IOLTA and the bulk of EAF monies are distributed pursuant to a formula similar to that used by the LSC to distribute funds to states. The formula weighs most heavily the number of indigent people per county in determining how much money flows to each county. Within a given county, funding favors larger organizations because it is distributed in proportion to the amount each organization has spent in the prior year “providing free legal services to the indigent.” This means that, within a given county, the funding formula favors larger organizations.

In addition, the State Bar of California awards some grants, on a competitive basis, to fund specific programs. A U.S. Department of Justice settlement with Bank of America to “resolve federal and state claims for financial fraud leading up to and during the financial crisis” was a significant source of such funds for many states. In California, the resulting $45 million fund, the Bank Stabilization and Community Reinvestment Grants (“bank grants”), is earmarked for “foreclosure prevention legal services and community redevelopment legal services.” Though only IOLTA-funded organizations are eligible for these bank grants, many recipients partner with non-IOLTA programs. As another example, 10% of EAF funds are set aside for grants that encourage courts to partner with local legal aid programs to incubate new projects, with funding tapering off over time as the programs attract other funders. According to Salena Copeland, Executive Director of the Legal Aid Association of California, the Legal Services Trust Fund Commission “looks favorably on rural partnership grants and lets them extend longer than others when the rural program is unable to find replacement funding.”

The 2010 Improving Civil Justice Report revealed geographical disparities in legal aid funding, documenting the extent to which rural Californians get the short end of the stick. In 2009, legal aid organizations serving poor people in rural counties spent just $18.56 per poor resident, compared to

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81 CALIFORNIA CIVIL LEGAL AID REVENUE SOURCES AND DISTRIBUTIONS, supra note [58]; Copeland E-mail I, supra note [ ].
82 Copeland E-mail I, supra note 78.
83 E-mail from Salena Copeland, Exec. Dir., Legal Aid Ass’n of Cal., to Lisa R. Pruitt, Professor of Law, Univ. of Cal., Davis (Mar. 27, 2018, 10:55 AM) (on file with Harvard Law Library) [hereinafter Copeland E-mail II]. Ninety percent of EAF funds are distributed pursuant to this formula, with the remainder distributed to courts for special projects. E-mail from Salena Copeland to Lisa Pruitt, March 19, 2018 (8:39 AM) (on file with Harvard Law School Library) [hereinafter Copeland E-mail III]. See also IMPROVING CIVIL JUSTICE IN RURAL CALIFORNIA, supra note 55, at 11 and Appendix D.
84 IMPROVING CIVIL JUSTICE IN RURAL CALIFORNIA, supra note 55, at 11 and Appendix D.
85 Id. See also Copeland Email II, supra note 83.
86 CAL. STATE AUDITOR, THE STATE BAR OF CALIFORNIA: IT NEEDS ADDITIONAL REVISIONS TO ITS EXPENSE POLICIES TO ENSURE THAT IT USES FUNDS PRUDENTLY 8 (June 2017) https://www.bsa.ca.gov/reports/2017-030/introduction.html [https://perma.cc/M53V-Y3FF]. See also CAL. LEGAL AID REVENUE SOURCES AND DISTRIBUTIONS, supra note Error! Bookmark not defined..  
87 CAL. LEGAL AID REVENUE SOURCES AND DISTRIBUTIONS, supra note Error! Bookmark not defined.; Copeland E-mail I, supra note 78.
88 CAL. LEGAL AID REVENUE SOURCES AND DISTRIBUTIONS, supra note Error! Bookmark not defined.; Copeland E-mail I, supra note 78. In 2017, the State Bar distributed $7.37 million in bank grant funds. See infra notes 84–88 (regarding recipients of those funds). California is not the only state to receive such funds; among the states we surveyed, Georgia also received these funds.
89 Copeland E-mail III, supra note 88 (March 19, 8:39 AM).
90 Copeland E-mail III, supra note 88 (March 19, 8:39 AM).
91 IMPROVING CIVIL JUSTICE IN RURAL CALIFORNIA, supra note 60, at 11 and Appendix D.
92 For these purposes, the State Bar of California considers the following counties to be “rural”: Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Colusa, Del Norte, Glenn, Humboldt, Imperial, Inyo, Kings, Lake, Lassen, Madera, Mariposa, Mendocino, Modoc, Mono, Nevada, Plumas, San Benito, San Luis Obispo, Sierra, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, Tuolumne, and Yuba; counties with mixed rural/urban populations are Butte, El Dorado, Fresno, Kern, Marin, Merced, Monterey, Napa, Placer, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Joaquin, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, Shasta, Solano, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Tulare, Tuolumne, Ventura, and Yuba. Legal Services Funding per Indigent Person by Population Density Category (2015) (on file with Harvard Law Library) [hereinafter Legal Services Funding by Population Density].
California’s overwhelming urban population is consistent with its reputation as one of the “bluest” of states. The urbanormativity of state institutions means that attracting political and institutional attention to rural deficits can be difficult. The state’s metrocentric and left-leaning vibe also creates challenges for attracting and retaining lawyers in the state’s rural reaches, an issue addressed in Part I.a.iv.

2. Where California Attorneys Are—and Are Not

One aspect of California’s recent attention to rural access to justice has been an awareness of the diminishing number of rural attorneys. Mapping the presence (and absence) of attorneys across California thus became critical. This task was taken up in 2016 by Professor James W. Meeker of UC Irvine, an ex officio member of the CCATJ, and two graduate students. Meeker’s team mapped 2016 attorney address data from the State Bar of California. That data set included both active and inactive lawyers, which is why the total number of lawyers (192,226) differs so dramatically from the ABA data presented in Table 2.

Meeker used a California classification scheme that divides the state into sub-county geographical units known as Medical Service Study Areas (MSSAs), each of which is categorized as “rural,” “urban,” or “frontier.” MSSAs are clusters of Census tracts that respond to legislative mandates requiring the Office of Statewide Health and Development Planning (OSHDP) to determine “areas of unmet priority need for primary care family physicians.” The California Commission on Access to Justice considered the MSSA scale an appropriate one for thinking about the rural lawyer shortage and the availability of other justice system services because the state’s many large counties are diverse in terms of the degree of development and population density. Even highly urbanized counties, e.g., Los Angeles County, are enormous by the standards of other states and feature rural pockets. Furthermore, it is logical that one should need to travel no farther to access legal services than one travels to access medical services.

$44.43 per poor resident in the state’s seven most urban counties. In counties with mixed rural and urban populations, the average expenditure was $26.43 per poor resident.

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93 IMPROVING CIVIL JUSTICE IN RURAL CALIFORNIA, supra note 60, at 11 and Appendix A. The seven urban counties for these purposes are Alameda, Contra Costa, Los Angeles, Orange, Sacramento, San Francisco and Santa Clara. See Legal Services Funding by Population Density, supra note 92.

94 For these purposes, the counties with mixed rural/urban populations are Butte, El Dorado, Fresno, Kern, Marin, Merced, Monterey, Napa, Placer, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Joaquin, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, Shasta, Solano, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Tulare, Tuolomne, Ventura and Yuba. Legal Services Funding by Population Density, supra note 92. IMPROVING CIVIL JUSTICE IN RURAL CALIFORNIA, supra note 55, at 11 and Appendix A.

95 These graduate students were Xiuye Wang and Carrie Reiling.

96 These data on using attorney addresses are geocoded to correspond to MSSAs. The data are on file with Harvard Law Library. [hereinafter Meeker Data].

97 E-mail from James W. Meeker, Professor of Criminology, Law and Soc’y, Univ. of Cal., Irvine to Lisa R. Pruitt, Professor of Law, Univ. of Cal., Davis (Mar. 19, 2018, 3:42 PM) (on file with Harvard Law School Library) (the data addresses used were those where attorneys receive statements for their bar dues, which presumably are work addresses).


99 Id. MSSAs were developed in 1976 by the California Healthcare Workforce Policy Commission (formerly California Health Manpower Policy Commission) to respond to legislative mandates requiring it to determine “areas of unmet priority need for primary care family physicians” (Song-Brown Act of 1973) and “geographical rural areas where unmet priority need for medical services exist” (Garamendi Rural Health Services Act of 1976). MSSAs are recognized by the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration, BHW as rational service areas for purposes of designating Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs), and Medically Underserved Areas and Medically Underserved Populations (MUA/MUPs). The MSSAs incorporate the U.S. Census total population, socioeconomic and demographic data and are updated with each decadal census . . . . Each MSSA is composed of one or more complete census tracts. MSSAs will not cross county lines. All population centers within the MSSA are within 30 minutes travel time to the largest population center.

100 See Table 9.

101 IMPROVING CIVIL JUSTICE IN RURAL CALIFORNIA, supra note 55, at 6.
Under the MSSA scheme, “urban” populations range from 75,000 to 125,000 people and reflect recognized community boundaries that share similar socio-economic and demographic characteristics. “Rural” MSSAs have 50,000 or fewer residents and population densities below 250 people per square mile, while “frontier” MSSAs are defined by population densities of fewer than 11 people per square mile.

Given California’s size and diversity, we divided the state into seven regions to facilitate analysis. The regions cluster counties based largely on economic and historical affinity, as well as similarities in physical geography. The regions are Southern California, the Inland Empire, the Central Valley, the Central Coast, the Greater Bay Area, the Gold Country/Sierra-Nevada, and far Northern California (“Far North”), as depicted in Map 1.

**Map 1: Regional Map of California**

103 See Medical Service Study Areas, supra note 99.
104 Id.
105 The counties are Los Angeles, Orange, San Diego and Ventura.
106 The counties are Imperial, Inyo, Riverside, and San Bernardino.
107 The counties are Fresno, Kern, Kings, Merced, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Tulare, and Yolo.
108 The counties are Monterey, San Benito, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Santa Cruz.
109 The counties are Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, and Sonoma.
110 The counties are Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, Madera, Mariposa, Mono, Nevada, Placer, Sierra, and Tuolumne.
111 The counties are Butte, Colusa, Del Norte, Glenn, Humboldt, Lake, Lassen, Mendocino, Modoc, Plumas, Shasta, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, and Yuba.
Meeker correlated the attorney data with U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2014 American Community Survey. Some of these data are presented in
MAP 6: POPULATION (BY MSSA) AND ATTORNEYS (PINK DOTS)
While Table 9 and Maps 2 and 4 depict county-level data, Maps 3 and 6 depict data at the scale of the MSSA. Map 5 depicts each county’s poverty rate from the 2012-2016 U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, data also provided in Table 9.

**MAP 2: RESIDENTS PER ATTORNEY BY COUNTY**
MAP 4: ATTORNEYS PER SQUARE MILE
MAP 6: POPULATION (BY MSSA) AND ATTORNEYS (PINK DOTS)
### Table 9: California Attorney Data 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County Name</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Attorney Count</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Attorneys per Resident</th>
<th>Poverty Rate*</th>
<th>Area in Sq Miles</th>
<th>Attorneys per square mile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>62,775</td>
<td>9,969,234</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>4,546.65</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>19,406</td>
<td>3,086,331</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>811.91</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>18,856</td>
<td>3,183,143</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>4,271.01</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ventura</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>3,233</td>
<td>835,790</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>1,868.12</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals and Averages for Region</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>104,270</td>
<td>17,074,498</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>11,497.69</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperial</td>
<td>Inland Empire</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>177,026</td>
<td>1,060</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>4,481.67</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inyo</td>
<td>Inland Empire</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18,439</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>10,226.88</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverside</td>
<td>Inland Empire</td>
<td>3,928</td>
<td>2,266,899</td>
<td>577</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>7,303.05</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Bernardino</td>
<td>Inland Empire</td>
<td>2,756</td>
<td>2,078,586</td>
<td>754</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>20,105.13</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals and Averages for Region</td>
<td>Inland Empire</td>
<td>6,906</td>
<td>4,540,950</td>
<td>658</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>42,116.72</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alameda</td>
<td>Greater Bay Area</td>
<td>9,357</td>
<td>1,559,308</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>767.55</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contra Costa</td>
<td>Greater Bay Area</td>
<td>5,526</td>
<td>1,118,079</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>974.77</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marin</td>
<td>Greater Bay Area</td>
<td>3,242</td>
<td>256,802</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>574.87</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napa</td>
<td>Greater Bay Area</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>139,253</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>788.58</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>Greater Bay Area</td>
<td>20,218</td>
<td>829,072</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>204.50</td>
<td>98.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Mateo</td>
<td>Greater Bay Area</td>
<td>5,896</td>
<td>739,837</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>479.22</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Clara</td>
<td>Greater Bay Area</td>
<td>11,785</td>
<td>1,841,569</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>1,304.05</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solano</td>
<td>Greater Bay Area</td>
<td>713</td>
<td>421,624</td>
<td>591</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>906.19</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonoma</td>
<td>Greater Bay Area</td>
<td>2,215</td>
<td>491,790</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>1,620.78</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals and Averages for Region</td>
<td>Greater Bay Area</td>
<td>59,536</td>
<td>7,397,334</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>7,620.50</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpine</td>
<td>Gold Country &amp; Sierra</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,202</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>743.19</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amador</td>
<td>Gold Country &amp; Sierra</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>37,159</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>605.95</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calaveras</td>
<td>Gold Country &amp; Sierra</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>44,921</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>1,036.92</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Dorado</td>
<td>Gold Country &amp; Sierra</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>181,465</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>1,734.33</td>
<td>0.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Madera</td>
<td>Gold Country &amp; Sierra</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>152,452</td>
<td>1,182</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>2,153.28</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariposa</td>
<td>Gold Country &amp; Sierra</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17,946</td>
<td>641</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>1,462.82</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mono</td>
<td>Gold Country &amp; Sierra</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>14,193</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>3,131.87</td>
<td>0.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>Gold Country &amp; Sierra</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>98,606</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>973.79</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placer</td>
<td>Gold Country &amp; Sierra</td>
<td>1,432</td>
<td>361,518</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>1,425.54</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra</td>
<td>Gold Country &amp; Sierra</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3,019</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>962.16</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuolumne</td>
<td>Gold Country &amp; Sierra</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>54,347</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>2,274.44</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals and Averages for Region</td>
<td>Gold Country &amp; Sierra</td>
<td>2,881</td>
<td>966,828</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>16,504.28</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butte</td>
<td>Far Northern</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>221,578</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>1,677.12</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colusa</td>
<td>Far Northern</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21,424</td>
<td>857</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>1,156.35</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Del Norte</td>
<td>Far Northern</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>28,066</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>1,054.11</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenn</td>
<td>Far Northern</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28,019</td>
<td>1,078</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>1,326.97</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humboldt</td>
<td>Far Northern</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>134,876</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>3,642.26</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake</td>
<td>Far Northern</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>64,209</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>1,329.42</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lassen</td>
<td>Far Northern</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33,356</td>
<td>1,011</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>4,720.10</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mendocino</td>
<td>Far Northern</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>87,612</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>3,542.35</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modoc</td>
<td>Far</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9,335</td>
<td>1,037</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>4,203.39</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Subregion</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Avg.</td>
<td>Pct.</td>
<td>Total Avg.</td>
<td>Averages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumas</td>
<td>Far Northern</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>19,286</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>2,613.43</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shasta</td>
<td>Far Northern</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>178,520</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>3,847.38</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siskiyou</td>
<td>Far Northern</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>44,261</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>6,347.35</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutter</td>
<td>Far Northern</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>95,067</td>
<td>715</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>608.49</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tehama</td>
<td>Far Northern</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>63,284</td>
<td>745</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>2,962.16</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity</td>
<td>Far Northern</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13,515</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>3,207.60</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuba</td>
<td>Far Northern</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>73,059</td>
<td>821</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>643.80</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals and Averages for Region</td>
<td>Far Northern</td>
<td>2,294</td>
<td>1,115,467</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>42,882.30</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresno</td>
<td>Central Valley</td>
<td>2,274</td>
<td>948,844</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>6,011.05</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kern</td>
<td>Central Valley</td>
<td>1,035</td>
<td>849,254</td>
<td>821</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>7,733.10</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kings</td>
<td>Central Valley</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>151,390</td>
<td>1,364</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>1,391.53</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merced</td>
<td>Central Valley</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>261,609</td>
<td>1,282</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>1,978.50</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacramento</td>
<td>Central Valley</td>
<td>9,629</td>
<td>1,413,430</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>789.84</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Joaquin</td>
<td>Central Valley</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>701,050</td>
<td>708</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>1,426.49</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanislaus</td>
<td>Central Valley</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>522,794</td>
<td>767</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>1,514.60</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulare</td>
<td>Central Valley</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>451,108</td>
<td>991</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>4,838.65</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolo</td>
<td>Central Valley</td>
<td>802</td>
<td>204,162</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>1,023.53</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals and Averages for Region</td>
<td>Central Valley</td>
<td>16,182</td>
<td>5,503,641</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
<td>26,707.30</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monterey</td>
<td>Central Coast</td>
<td>1,190</td>
<td>424,927</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>3,330.41</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Benito</td>
<td>Central Coast</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>56,888</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>1,390.47</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Luis Obispo</td>
<td>Central Coast</td>
<td>997</td>
<td>274,184</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>3,342.78</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Barbara</td>
<td>Central Coast</td>
<td>1,876</td>
<td>431,555</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>2,860.11</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
<td>Central Coast</td>
<td>1,011</td>
<td>267,203</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>457.15</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Meeker’s analysis reveals that among California’s 192,226 attorneys, nearly 96% (189,551) have addresses in urban MSSAs; slightly more than 3% (7,333) have addresses in rural MSSAs; and less than one-fifth of one percent—just 324 attorneys (0.17%)—have “frontier” addresses. Meanwhile, among the state’s 39.2 million residents, more than 33 million (87%) live in urban MSSAs; 12.35% (4.7 million) live in rural MSSAs; and about two-thirds of a percent (252,378) live in frontier MSSAs.

The attorney-to-population mismatch is apparent from these statewide figures. The ratio of attorneys to urban residents in California is 1:175, while each rural lawyer serves nearly four times as many residents (1:626), and each frontier lawyer serves on average a still greater number (1:738). San Francisco County, which is consolidated with San Francisco City and is the most densely populated California county with 829,000 people living in just 204 square miles, has the highest attorney-to-population ratio at 1:41. The lowest attorney-to-population ratio is 1:1,364, in Kings County in the Central Valley.

Because of the significance of agriculture in the Central Valley it is the region most commonly associated with rurality. In fact, just over a quarter of the Central Valley’s 5.5 million residents live in rural or frontier MSSAs, a far lower percentage than some other regions. As a region, the Central Valley’s attorney-to-population ratio is a respectable 1:340. That figure is dramatically skewed, however, by the inclusion of Sacramento County, which has an especially high ratio of 1:146; a concentration of attorneys not surprising in a state capital. When Sacramento County is removed from the cluster, the Central Valley’s ratio falls to 1:624. In addition to the particular attorney shortage in Kings County, which is noted above, several other Central Valley counties have abysmal ratios. These attorney shortages are less surprising, perhaps, when you consider the high concentrations of poverty in the region, as depicted in Map 4 and Table 9.

While the adjacent Central Coast region is less associated with agriculture than the Central Valley, the percentage of rural and frontier residents is nearly twice as high in the Central Coast as in the Valley. It should not come as a surprise that the lowest attorney to resident ratio among Central Coast counties is San Benito (1:801), which is adjacent to the Valley and shares many similarities with it.
with it in terms of the economy and demographics. San Benito County’s economy is dominated by agriculture, and the poverty rate is high. Other Central Coast counties are also agricultural in part, but their coastal exposure is a magnet for tourism, wealth, and human capital—including lawyers—which improve the ratios. The overall ratio for the Central Coast region is 1:283, one of the most favorable in the state and especially robust for a region with significant rural reaches. Yet few of these lawyers practice in inland communities. The dramatically uneven distribution of attorneys within the region is illustrated in Maps 2, 3, and 4.

Two other California regions are even more dominated by rural and frontier living than central California: the Far North and the Gold Country/Sierra Nevada. In addition to agriculture (including, notably, marijuana), tourism is a staple of their economies. In the Far North, less than one-fifth of the 1.1 million residents live in urban MSSAs. These 16 counties are served by fewer than 2,300 lawyers spread across some 43,000 square miles (27% of the state’s land area), or one attorney for every 20 square miles. That’s an extremely stark contrast with San Francisco County, for example, where there are nearly 100 attorneys for each square mile. Far North counties with particularly poor attorney ratios include Glenn, Modoc, and Lassen, where each attorney serves more than a thousand residents. Table 9 and Map 2.

In the Gold Country/Sierra-Nevada, more than 60% of nearly a million residents live in frontier or rural areas. The region is served by nearly 2,900 attorneys for a respectable ratio of 1:335. The farther from a major metropolitan area (e.g., the Greater Bay Area, Greater Sacramento) a county lies, however, the lower its attorney-to-population ratio tends to be. This may be a consequence of greater economic activity in exurban areas than in more rural ones. Like other places rich in natural amenities, e.g. coastal communities, these counties may also attract retired and semi-retired lawyers. We would also expect these counties to be more attractive to young lawyers who might be drawn to the region’s outdoor amenities.

An analysis of the rural attorney shortage in California should consider more than attorney-to-population ratios. The attorney counts in the state’s least populous counties, which include many in the Gold Country/Sierra-Nevada, are among the most worrisome. Consider Sierra County, a sliver of the region is illustrated in Map 2. Table 9 and Map 2.

Id. More than 58% of Gold Country/Sierra Nevada residents live in rural MSSAs, and more than 2% live in frontier MSSAs. Meeker Data, supra note 106.

A number of these counties have very poor ratios, including Madera, where each lawyer serves nearly 1,200 residents. Table 9 and Map 2.

See generally LAWRENCE C. HAMILTON ET AL., U. N.H., CAREY INST., PLACE MATTERS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN FOUR RURAL AMERICAS (2008), https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1040&context=carey [https://perma.cc/ACF9-K7C] (characterizing one group of rural counties as amenity-rich, and therefore having more hopeful futures than most rural counties); Rural America at a Glance, supra note 4 (USDA’s Economic Research Service recently recognized that the fastest-growing rural counties in the country are those with leisure-driven economies).
private representation; having been admitted to the bar in 1972, she is likely nearing retirement.\footnote{C. Ingrid Larsson, http://members.calbar.ca.gov/fal/Member/Detail/50964 (last visited Apr. 21, 2018).}

Other attorneys with Sierra County addresses work as judges, prosecutors, and in other roles.\footnote{E-mail from Herb Whitaker, Manag. Att’y., Legal Servs. of N. Cal., Mother Lode Office, Auburn, Cal., to Lisa R. Pruitt, Professor of Law, Univ. of Cal., Davis (Nov. 27, 2017, 5:27 PM) (on file with Harvard Law School Library); comments of Michael G. Colantuono, Chair, Bd. of Tr., State Bar of Cal., Jan. 26, 2018. Colantuono’s law practice is based in neighboring Nevada County. https://chwlaw.us/attorneys/michael-g-colantuono/ [https://perma.cc/9WTT-AUK8].}

Such county-level scrutiny of places like Sierra County reveals an important limitation of the Meeker data: not only do the data include inactive attorneys, they do not indicate how many attorneys in any given MSSA (or county) are accepting clients. Many are employed by government entities and in jobs for which attorney licensure is not required. Further, they include inactive attorneys.\footnote{See infra Part I.E.} In addition to Sierra County, other Far North and Gold County/Sierra Nevada counties with particularly low attorney counts include Alpine, Modoc, Colusa, and Glenn.\footnote{See Pruitt & Colgan, Justice Deserts, supra note [ ], at 269-72 (2010); Judith K. Meierhenry, Confidentiality and Conflicts of Interest: A Guide for South Dakota Lawyers, 59 S.D. L. REV. 557 (2014); Wandler, Expanding Local Legal Services, supra note 19, at 229-31, 245-49; IMPROVING CIVIL JUSTICE IN RURAL CALIFORNIA, supra note 55, at 12.}

These low attorney counts signal the sorts of additional concerns seen in states where many counties have small populations: when the attorney count drops below a certain level, few if any of the attorneys present are actually working in private practice or accepting clients\footnote{Sierra County residents, for example, have access to court self-help resources in neighboring Nevada County. The latter has fixed hours, while Sierra County’s self-help center is by appointment only. Self-Help Center, THE SUPERIOR COURT OF CAL., CTY. OF SIERRA, http://www.sierra.courts.ca.gov/selfhelp/index.htm [https://perma.cc/8ZBD-UH2X]}; in addition, conflicts of interest become increasingly common.\footnote{Driving Directions from Sierra City, CA to Truckee, CA, GOOGLE MAPS, https://www.google.com/maps (follow “Directions” hyperlink; then search starting point field for “Sierra City, CA” and search destination field for “Truckee, CA”) [https://perma.cc/V7Q6-JJUD].} As a consequence, residents must sometimes travel to neighboring counties to access legal and other justice-system services,\footnote{Driving Directions from Downieville, CA to Nevada City, CA, GOOGLE MAPS, https://www.google.com/maps (follow “Directions” hyperlink; then search starting point field for “Downieville, CA” and search destination field for “Nevada City, CA”) [https://perma.cc/77E6-9G4F].} while attorneys must travel from outside the county to keep the justice system and local government functioning. In California’s vast mountainous regions, such travel is no small burden. The main thoroughfare through Sierra County is winding, scenic, and historic State Highway 49, named for the Gold Rush era. By way of illustration, the travel time from Sierra City to Truckee, in neighboring Nevada County, is an hour,\footnote{See supra note [ ] and accompanying text.} as is that between Sierra County’s seat, Downieville, and Nevada City, the seat of Nevada County.\footnote{Vast segments of eastern (Sierra Nevada) and northern (Sierra Nevada and Cascades) California include extensive public lands, which is one reason few people reside there. Discover the Inland Empire, VISIT CALIFORNIA, http://www.visitcalifornia.com/region/discover-inland-empire (last visited May 3, 2018).} Truckee and Nevada City represent the nearest critical mass of lawyers for anyone living in Sierra County who is unable to secure the services of the sole Downieville lawyer in private practice.\footnote{Table 9.}

Thus far, the focus of this survey has been primarily on the state’s northern and central regions, but a significant part of California’s southern third is also rural. The Inland Empire—so named to differentiate it from the coastal areas that dominate California’s image—is a region of deserts and mountains,\footnote{Table 9.} including vast stretches of public land. Though comprised of just four counties, this region constitutes 26% of the state’s land area (about the same as the combined 16 Far North counties) and is home to 12% of California’s population.\footnote{Table 9.}

The largest of the Inland Empire counties, San Bernardino, covers more than 20,000 square miles, about twice the size of Massachusetts. The vast majority of San Bernardino County residents live in
metropolitan areas such as those anchored by the cities of San Bernardino, Riverside, and Palm Springs. Those and other urban MSSAs are also, predictably, where the region’s lawyers are concentrated, leaving the 11.5% of those living in remote areas of southeastern California underserved because lawyers are literally out of reach. 143 The attorney-to-population ratios in these counties are troubling, as is that for the region. 144

Even counties like San Diego and Ventura are home to rural regions east of the coastal areas for which they are known. Extraordinarily, Los Angeles County—more than twice the size of the State of Delaware and home to more than a tenth of the state’s population and the second-largest city in the nation—also includes rural pockets. 145 Indeed, the only California county other than San Francisco

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143 Meeker Data, supra note [106]. A more detailed analysis of this region is offered in Pruitt & Williams, infra note 152.

144 See

MAP 6: POPULATION (BY MSSA) AND ATTORNEYS (PINK DOTS)

145 See Meeker Data, supra note 106.
with no rural or frontier MSSAs is Orange County.146 Small in land area but densely populated, the coastal county is tucked between Los Angeles and San Diego counties.

Some of the disparities in lawyer availability are best revealed not by comparing counties or regions, but by looking at where lawyers are within a particular county. Fresno County makes an interesting case study because it represents a blend of rural and urban: Fresno (City), California’s fifth largest city, is surrounded by rural areas, with the Sierra Nevada rising to the east and central valley farms stretching south and west from it. The county covers some 6,000 square miles,147 of which 98% is classified as rural under the MSSA scheme.148 While 37% of the population lives in those rural areas, just 5% of Fresno County attorneys have addresses there.149 Thus, each lawyer in an urban part of Fresno County serves around 417 people and about 1/20 of a square mile, while each rural lawyer serves around 2,887 people and 48 square miles.150 The spatial distribution of lawyers in Fresno County—or more precisely their spatial concentration—is depicted in Map 6. Because the outlying areas of Fresno County are dominated by agricultural enterprises that employ a great deal of migrant labor, it stands to reason that one of the greatest legal needs there is for employment and immigration advice, in addition to the full panoply of legal services people everywhere need, e.g., family law, eviction defense, health law, and criminal matters.151 Indeed, some of the most notable pro bono efforts undertaken by large urban firms in relation to rural California have aimed to provide immigration assistance, especially in Central Valley counties like Fresno.152 Such pro bono outreach has also made use of technology to connect metropolitan legal resources to rural needs.153

MAP 7: FRESNO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA
Each pink dot is an attorney

146 Id.
147 Quick Facts, supra note 59 (Type “Fresno County, California” in search bar, and select “Geography: Population by Square Mile” from “Select a Fact” menu).
148 Meeker Data, supra note 106.
149 Id.
150 Id.
151 See infra notes [172, 174] (discussing needs identified by NCLA); see also supra notes 70–71 (discussing the rural legal needs identified in IMPROVING CIVIL JUSTICE IN RURAL CALIFORNIA); supra notes [ ] (discussing needs identified in THE JUSTICE GAP REPORT, supra note 9).
152 Lisa R. Pruitt & Rebecca H. Williams, Improving Access to Justice in the Rural Reaches of Southern California, L.A. LAW. MAG., Mar. 2018, at 26–32. Of course, LSC-funded organizations are limited in providing assistance with immigration matters. See infra note [ ]. See also infra note [ ] (discussing UCOP Central Valley Fellowship).
In Far Northern California, Shasta County is the most populous and only metropolitan county\(^\text{154}\); its county seat, Redding, with a population of about 92,000 residents, is by far the largest California city north of greater Sacramento.\(^\text{155}\) Indeed, Redding is the only part of Shasta County that is not rural or frontier, yet the lion’s share of Shasta County’s attorneys—87%—have addresses in the Redding MSSA.\(^\text{156}\) Only 33 of the county’s attorneys have addresses in rural parts of Shasta County, while another 23 have frontier addresses.\(^\text{157}\) Shasta County covers nearly 4,000 square miles and many of its residents reside far from the critical mass of attorneys situated in the Redding metro area. This is depicted in Map 7. The attorney-to-population ratio in Redding is a respectable 1:257, a sharp contrast to a rate less than one-fifth of that in the remainder of Shasta County.\(^\text{158}\)

\(^{154}\) Quick Facts, supra note 59 (type “Shasta County, California” in search bar and select “Population Estimates July 1, 2016” from “Select a Fact” menu). The population of Shasta County is 180,000. Id.  
\(^{155}\) Id. (type “Redding, California” in search bar and select “Population Estimates July 1, 2016” from “Select a Fact” menu).  
\(^{156}\) Within Shasta County, 387 of 443 attorneys have addresses within the Redding MSSA. Meeker Data, supra note 106.  
\(^{157}\) Meeker Data, supra note 97.  
\(^{158}\) Id. (the attorney to resident ratio in rural and frontier Shasta County is 1:1,408).
Finally, Meeker’s analysis suggests that the poor and elderly—both vulnerable populations—are over-represented in rural California, which is consistent with national trends. The data indicate that poor people are distributed evenly though rural and urban parts of the Central Valley, which includes a number of population centers, whereas the poor are more concentrated in rural and frontier areas of counties in the Far North and Gold Country/Sierra-Nevada, which generally have smaller county seats. The elderly, too, are somewhat over-represented in rural and frontier parts of those eastern and far northern regions, but slightly under-represented in rural and frontier parts of the Central Valley.

3. Policy Responses to Rural Justice Deficits

Responding to the data and trends outlined in the prior sections, the State Bar of California and associated entities, including the California Commission on Access to Justice (CCATJ), have recently shifted more attention to the rural lawyer shortage and associated justice system challenges. One tack

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160 In the Far North, for example, 89.2% of residents over age 65, and 91% of those living below the poverty line reside in rural or frontier areas, compared to 82% of the overall population. In the Gold Country/Sierra-Nevada, 63.2% of the elderly and 72.9% of those below the poverty line live in rural or frontier areas, compared to 60% of the general population. In the Central Valley, 25.6% of the elderly and 27.5% of those below the poverty line live in rural or frontier MSSAs, compared to 26.5% of the population. The percentage of rural or frontier residents whose incomes are 200% of the federal poverty line or lower is 81.8% for the Far North; 72.4% for Gold Country/Sierra-Nevada; and 28.1% for the Central Valley. Meeker Data, supra note 97.
161 See Pruitt & Showman, supra note 18; Sandefur & Smyth, supra note ___.
162 Meeker data, supra note [__].
163 Id.
has been to re-think the allocation of funding streams to the state’s 97 legal aid organizations. An October 2016 letter from the CCATJ to the Legal Services Trust Fund advocated that new funding streams be allocated in ways that better serve rural communities, thus beginning to narrow the widening rural-urban justice gap.\(^\text{164}\) This advocacy acknowledges the particular spatial and economic challenges facing rural communities, as well as the critical roles played by the legal aid organizations serving them. Deficits in services for low-income rural residents can undermine the efforts of legal aid organizations.\(^\text{165}\) The CCATJ letter called the Trust Fund’s attention to three principles of the 2010 Report that support a reallocation: (1) the pursuit of geographical equality, specifically that “the amount and type of legal assistance available to low and moderate income Californians should not depend on where those individuals reside”; (2) increased funding for rural legal services “with the caveat that ‘any initiative to address the severe lack of resources in rural areas should not be developed in a way that unnecessarily undermines urban programs’”; and (3) the development of “minimum access guidelines” as a basis for allocating funding.\(^\text{166}\) The latter item responds to the state’s burgeoning rural-urban funding gap: since the 2010 Report, 25 of California’s 28 rural counties\(^\text{167}\) have seen their legal services funding per poor person fall below the new state average of $21.37.\(^\text{168}\) Between 2009 and 2015, rural funding fell to $14.72 per poor resident, less than a third of the urban funding level, which increased to $47.23 per poor resident.\(^\text{169}\) Robust donations to urban-focused legal aid programs, a reflection of a well-documented rural-urban charity gap,\(^\text{170}\) are presumably a significant cause for this widening geographical inequality in legal aid funding. Although the LSTF has not taken any formal action on the letter, the latest round of grant recipients (for bank grant awards) does include many programs that serve rural populations.\(^\text{171}\)

In recent years, the State Bar has supported several incubator projects aimed at launching lawyers to serve modest means clients. Most of the incubators have been in highly urbanized places,\(^\text{172}\) but two grants went to programs in places that are rural by some measure and thus might have channeled lawyers into rural practice. Unfortunately, the only rural incubator to get off the ground shut down after less than a year, though not due to any lack of demand. Northern California Lawyer Access, Inc., (NCLA) in Grass Valley (Nevada County), in the state’s Gold Country/Sierra-Nevada, attracted a great deal of early interest as both a lawyer-referral service and an incubator. NCLA aimed to serve

\(^{164}\) Letter from CCATJ to Legal Services Trust Fund Commissioners, Oct. 12, 2016 (on file with Harvard Law Library) [hereinafter Letter from CCATJ to LSTFC]. See also supra notes 94– Error! Bookmark not defined., describing funding disparities among rural, urban and mixed rural-urban counties in California. See also Pruitt & Showman, supra note 18; Sandefur & Smyth, supra note _ .

\(^{165}\) Letter from CCATJ to LSTFC]. supra note Error! Bookmark not defined.. Among other issues, the letter specifically noted the disproportionate impact of wildfires on rural communities and the added work legal aid organizations do in the wake of such disasters. See Amy Yarbrough, Lending legal aid after the Valley Fire devastation, CAL. BAR JOURNAL (Nov. 2015) http://www.calbarjournal.com/November2015/TopHeadlines/TH1.aspx [https://perma.cc/N8PG-TFUS].

\(^{166}\) Letter from CCATJ to LSTFC, supra note _ .

\(^{167}\) Legal Services Funding by Population Density, supra note 92.

\(^{168}\) Letter from Letter from CCATJ to LSTFC, supra note ] ; see also supra note [ .

\(^{169}\) Letter from CCATJ to LSTFC, supra note _ .


\(^{171}\) Spreadsheet of 2018 Bank Grant Awards (on file with Harvard Law Library). Rural-serving programs (with respective annual awards) include: California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation ($200,000); California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc. ($275,000); Central California Legal Services ($275,000); Family Violence Appellate Project ($100,000); and Legal Services of Northern California ($250,000).

\(^{172}\) For example, the Los Angeles Incubator Consortium (LAIC) is a successful example of an attorney incubator program that has helped local attorneys and law school graduates successfully adjust to serving rural areas. The LAIC is a partnership between Southwestern Law School, UCLA School of Law, Loyola Law School, Los Angeles, local legal aid organizations and the Los Angeles County Law Library, which trains new attorneys in Los Angeles. See LOS ANGELES INCUBATOR CONSORTIUM, https://www.laincubatorconsortium.com/ [https://perma.cc/9AZV-XG49].
a 20-county area, including parts of Far Northern California and the Gold Country/Sierra-Nevada. The NCLA reported in its interim self-assessment that during the first six months of 2015:

We captured 630 individual calls for [an] average number 105 requests for legal assistance per month. We were able to refer only 21% of those to traditional LRS [lawyer referral service] panel attorneys. Our working assumption in applying for the State Bar Incubator/Moderate Means grant was, and continues to be[,] that a large proportion of those requests we turned away were seeking low or mid-cost legal services. Despite the fact that we purposely did not market our new academy and low-cost services, we were unprepared for the July increase in requests for service. The word was out and our wait-list was growing each day.

NCLA thus documented a clear need for low-cost legal services in the region.

Regarding the incubator in particular, four solo practitioners “graduated” from the incubator in 2015, and several of these lawyers are already integrated into the Nevada County legal scene.

An incubator to be hosted by San Joaquin College of Law (SJCL), a California-accredited institution in Fresno County, was approved for a State Bar grant in 2015. Ultimately, however, that incubator project did not proceed because the institution was unable to identify a sufficient number of its graduates in need of incubator support. That is, the vast majority of the institution’s graduates—most of whom are coming from the region—find jobs there and do not need incubator assistance.

The CCATJ continues to seek new opportunities to support rural-based and rural-focused incubators.

174 Id. at 2–3 (further documenting the demand for legal assistance: “During the month of July 2015, our office’s two line phone system and 2 volunteers attempted to handle 960 calls. This number included incoming and outgoing calls. After removing outgoing messages, duplicates, and a large number of voicemail messages requesting low or moderate cost services. Some of these callers were referred to our website where they could fill out a form and contact us that way. However, due to staffing and equipment shortages, we were able to return only 277 of those calls during the reporting period (July 2015). Of those we returned (108), 36 (33%) were referred to a traditional market-rate LRS panel member.”).
175 Comments of Michael G. Colantuono, Chair of Board of Trustees, State Bar of California, Jan. 26, 2018, Board of Trustees meeting. See also Report on the Moderate Means Incubator Project of the California Commission on Access to Justice, June 2016 (on file with Harvard Law Library).
176 Report on the Moderate Means Incubator Project, supra note __, at 4 (“Seven solos expressed interest in joining NCLA’s 2016 class and four solos graduated from the class of 2015. Of the latter four, two are now in their own solo practices, one is working as a municipal attorney, and the fourth was asked to take over the practice of a local solo. Despite their small size, they provided hundreds of hours of pro bono legal assistance, including to victims of the wildfires that hit their area last year.”).
177 NCLA Interim Performance Report, supra note [ ].
178 See Report on the Moderate Means Incubator Project, supra note __, at 6 & n.3.
179 Id.
180 Id.
181 Discussions at the most recent meetings of the California Commission on Access to Justice on December 8, 2017 and February 9, 2018 addressed the goals and needs of the Rural Task Force and gave liaison updates for the Standing Committee on the Delivery of Legal Services (SCDLS), Legal Services Trust Fund Commission (LSTFC), Council on Access and Fairness (COAF), and the Legal Aid Association of California (LAAC). See Notice and Agency, THE STATE BAR OF CAL., CAL. COMM’N ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE (Dec. 8, 2017), http://board.calbar.ca.gov/docs/meeting/meeting1000020285.pdf [https://perma.cc/FC9T-QG53]; Notice and Agency, THE STATE BAR OF CAL., CAL. COMM’N ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE (Feb. 9, 2018), http://board.calbar.ca.gov/docs/meeting/meeting1000021373.pdf [https://perma.cc/F96Q-3F2J]. Furthermore, the most recent meetings of the Rural Task Force on February 16, 2018 and March 16, 2018 concerned salient issues such as rural attorney shortages, disaster legal services, immigration, and housing problems related to rural homelessness and housing shortages. See Notice and Agenda, Rural Task Force Meeting, THE STATE BAR OF CAL., CAL. COMM’N ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE (Feb. 16, 2018), http://board.calbar.ca.gov/docs/meeting/meeting1000021376.pdf [https://perma.cc/T9N4-ER23]; Notice and Agenda, Rural Task Force Meeting, THE STATE BAR OF CAL., CAL. COMM’N ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE (Mar. 16, 2018), http://board.calbar.ca.gov/docs/meeting/meeting1000021583.pdf [https://perma.cc/94R7-SYX2]. The CCATJ and
In January, 2018, the State Bar of California Board of Trustees took up the matter of the rural lawyer shortage at its annual strategic planning session. The Board invited the co-chairs of the Rural Task Force, Lisa Pruitt and Selena Copeland, Executive Director of the Legal Aid Association of California, to speak about the spatial distribution of California lawyers and the law student debt crisis that is contributing to that shortage. Following that presentation, the Board in March 2018 finalized its strategic five-year plan, including five access-to-justice objectives. None of those objectives acknowledged or addressed the rural lawyer shortage explicitly, although related issues such as the high cost of legal education and loan forgiveness programs, as well as the possibility of licensing para-professionals, were articulated.

4. The Role of Legal Education

With 56 law schools—including 21 ABA-AALS Accredited Institutions, 15 California-Accredited ones, and 20 unaccredited “distance learning, fixed facility, and correspondence” schools—the legal education landscape of the Golden State is far more vast and varied than in the average state. High tuition at ABA-AALS Accredited law schools and resultant student debt burden shapes most graduates’ decisions about how—and where—they use their law degrees. California has five high-caliber public law schools, but the cost of attending these institutions is much greater than comparable schools in other states. The average 2018 cost of attending one of California’s five public law schools was $46,453 in tuition and fees (in state). Table 8 That figure is as much as three times the cost of other states’ public law schools with comparable rankings and employment rates. The average annual tuition for all ABA-AALS Accredited law schools in California—including both public and private institutions—is only marginally greater, at $49,558, for a total of $148,673 over three years. In part as a consequence of such high law school tuition, average student debt among those graduating from California’s ABA-AALS Accredited institutions in 2016 was nearly $143,000, some 27% greater than the national average.

It thus stands to reason that the level of student debt associated with ABA-AALS Accredited legal education in California deters students from seriously considering rural practice, where

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Rural Task Force are subcommittees of The State Bar of California and all meeting agendas are made available on its website. See State Bar Committee and Commissions Meeting Archive, The State Bar of Cal., http://board.calbar.ca.gov/CommitteeArchive.aspx [https://perma.cc/GH5H-AZXP].


184 See Calbar, AALS Accredited Institutions, 15 California, 20 public law schools/public-cost-rankings [https://perma.cc/T2MN-87QX] (averaging the 2018 in-state cost of attendance at University of California, Berkeley, University of California, Davis, University of California, Los Angeles, University of California, Irvine, and University of California, Hastings law schools).

185 The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Law, for example, charged $23,889 for in-state tuition and fees in 2018, while the University of Georgia School of Law cost $19,696, the University of Alabama School of Law cost $23,720, and the William & Mary Law School cost $32,964. See id. See also supra tbl. 8 (providing the average cost of legal education in each of the six states compared in this article).


remuneration is unlikely to be competitive with metropolitan salaries. One UC Davis Law graduate stated in a late 2017 communication that she was practicing in a county seat in far northern California, having chosen that locale in part because she had spent some of her youth in the area. The lawyer had graduated early in the current decade with about $180,000 in law school debt, on top of about $20,000 in undergraduate debt. The lawyer’s practice was thriving, and she was able to charge clients (mostly local government entities) $200/hour, of which her firm paid her a percentage. Her income was about $88,000 in 2017. Yet the lawyer had been unable to make sufficient payments on her student loans to begin to reduce the principal. She was making income-based payments of about $700/month, which meant her loan balance was steadily increasing due to negative amortization and was currently approaching $300,000. The opportunity to make income-based payments on her student loans meant the lawyer could afford to make a mortgage payment, but she was unable to buy a home because she found banks unwilling to lend to people with debt that can be forced into full repayment, which would be the case for her if the government eliminated the income-based repayment program.

This scenario suggests the need for some sort of generous loan-repayment assistance—a sum commensurate with the high cost of legal education in California—for lawyers willing to serve rural residents. This funding could come from the state legislature, the State Bar of California and/or law schools. It should be on offer not only for public interest lawyers in rural areas, but also for private practitioners, who can be seen as serving the public interest by their very presence in attorney deserts. Indeed, Stanford Law School’s Loan Repayment Assistance Program—alone among California law schools—recognizes this phenomenon and covers graduates doing this type of work.

But the high cost of legal education is not the only consideration keeping California lawyers from staking a claim to legal work in the state’s rural reaches. Like young lawyers elsewhere, many California law graduates are unwilling to forego the urban amenities to which they are accustomed, and they do not want to leave urban-based family and friends. They also express concerns about not being able to find a life partner in a rural area or—if they already have a partner—they worry that the partner will be unable to find a good job in rural California. Finally, young Californians often find the political and social climate of rural California off-putting. As one attorney expressed it,

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189 But see infra note [ ].
190 Telephone Interview with a graduate of the University of California, Davis, School of Law (Oct. 19, 2017) [hereinafter UC Davis Telephone Interview] (e-mail referencing interview on file with Harvard Law School Library; interview summarized in Dec. 18, 2017 document).
191 E-mail from a graduate of the University of California, Davis, School of Law to author (Jan. 18, 2018, 13:54 PST) (on file with the Harvard Law School Library) [hereinafter UC Davis E-mail].
192 UC Davis Graduate Telephone Interview, supra note 185.
193 UC Davis Graduate E-mail, supra note 191.
194 Id.
195 Id.
196 See What Are the Priciest Public Law Schools?, supra note 185. The amount of student debt accrued by students at California law schools is about a third higher than elsewhere in the nation. See Legal Aid Spreadsheet, supra note 188.
197 See infra Part I.E.1. (discussing how rural private-practice attorneys in South Dakota serve the public interest).
199 See Pruitt et al., supra note 29, at 628–42, 645–54 (reporting the reasons given by Arkansas lawyers and law students for choosing not to practice in a rural locale).
200 E-mail from Salena Copeland, Exec. Dir., Legal Aid Ass’n of Cal., to Lisa R. Pruitt, Prof. of Law, Univ. of Cal., Davis, School of Law (Mar. 17, 2018, 15:49 PM) [hereinafter Copeland E-mail IV] (on file with Harvard Law Library) (quoting a lawyer at Central California Legal Services who said of recent graduates, “They’re young and want to be in a fun city.”).
201 See also IMPROVING CIVIL JUSTICE IN RURAL CALIFORNIA, supra note 55, at 12. See also E-mail from Liza Thantranon, Legal Servs. of Northern Cal., to Lisa R. Pruitt, Professor of Law, Univ. of Cal., Davis (Jan. 22, 2018, 4:47 PM) (on file with Harvard Law Library) (regarding Legal Services of Northern California study on retention of lawyers, comparing its urban and rural office locations).
“There is emotional stress of feeling socially and politically isolated in a place like Modesto,”\textsuperscript{202} the seat of Stanislaus County, in the Central Valley.

One way to counter this urbancentrism among law graduates is to expose them to rural practice early and often, as through summer and clinical opportunities. To that end, several California law schools have participated in is One Justice’s Justice Bus, which takes students, as well as attorneys, into rural locales for short-term legal clinics.\textsuperscript{203} Some law schools provide other opportunities for rural engagement. For example, law students participating in UC Irvine’s Community and Economic Development Clinic had the opportunity to represent farmworkers living in a substandard mobile-home park in Riverside County’s Coachella Valley.\textsuperscript{204} UC Davis Law School’s new Tribal Justice Project will engage students with rural California.\textsuperscript{205} Stanford Law School’s Organizations and Transactions clinic, too, provides opportunities for rural exposure by representing small food and agricultural enterprises, many in rural locales.\textsuperscript{206} Finally, the State Bar of California in 2017 made a joint grant to three California law schools for purposes of developing a “Practice 99” course, a “model law school curriculum to foster new practices to serve low and modest-means clients,”\textsuperscript{207} particularly in the Central Valley post-graduation.\textsuperscript{208} In a sense, it is an incubator-type course, but offered as law school curriculum rather than as an add-on program. The program aims to empower “Practice 99 graduates” to “put their knowledge to work to open firms that offer sliding scale fees.”\textsuperscript{209}

Fellowships, both during and after law school, also target rural needs. The Legal Aid Association of California sponsors the Dan Bradley Fellowship, which offers summer support to a student wishing to pursue a career in public interest law and who “want[s] to spend [the] summer working in a rural area or on a rural issue.”\textsuperscript{210} As of 2018, UC Davis is sponsoring a two-year fellowship for a new graduate to work in the Central Valley representing those with family member(s) detained by immigration authorities in one of two area detention facilities.\textsuperscript{211}

\textsuperscript{202} Copeland E-mail IV, supra note 200 (quoting a former staff attorney with California Rural Legal Assistance).


\textsuperscript{205} UC Davis Tribal Justice Project, https://law.ucdavis.edu/centers/critical-race/tribal-justice/ (last visited April 24, 2018)

\textsuperscript{206} See Jay A. Mitchell, Getting Into the Field, 7 J. OF FOOD LAW & POLICY 69, 82, 93, 97 (2011).

\textsuperscript{207} Grant Agreement Between the State Bar of California Office of Legal Services—Center on Access to Justice and San Joaquin College of Law. Aug. 21, 2017 (on file with Harvard Law Library). The three law schools collaborating on the project were San Joaquin College of Law, UC Berkeley and UC Davis. Id. The grant was made pursuant to a California Bar Foundation Diversity Pipeline Grant Application. Id.

\textsuperscript{208} Among other details provided in the grant application were data on the lawyer shortage in the Central Valley. Id.

\textsuperscript{209} Id.

\textsuperscript{210} Legal Aid Association of California, Dan Bradley Fellowship, http://laaconline.org/award/dan-bradley-fellowship/ (last visited March 31, 2018).

\textsuperscript{211} UCOP Fellowship Opportunity—Central Valley Legal Fellow, job description, (on file with Harvard Law School Library). The description for the fellowship elaborates on the need:

The Central Valley is a rural community comprised of six counties with an immigrant population estimated at 885,700. The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy estimates that 273,000 undocumented immigrants call this region home. The legal resources in the community are scarce. There are approximately 3-5 solo immigration practitioners in the Fresno area at capacity for paid and pro bono cases. The Central Valley Legal Partnership Initiative has as its vision the establishment of legal services throughout the Central Valley that service Latino communities from Kern to San Joaquin counties.

Id The fellowship is funded by the University of California, Office of the President but offered through UC Davis School of Law. E-mail from Leticia M. Saucedo, Prof. of Law, Univ. of Cal., Davis, to Lisa R. Pruitt, Prof. of Law, Univ. of Cal. Davis (Apr. 3, 2018, 1:24 PM) (on file with Harvard Law School Library).
In light of these concerns and trends, policy makers should seriously consider how California-accredited law schools—some of which are located in rural or quasi-rural areas, e.g., San Joaquin College of Law in Fresno County; Cal Northern School of Law in Butte County (Far North); and Monterey College of Law with locations in Monterey, San Luis Obispo (both Central Coast) and Kern (Central Valley) counties—can be a larger part of the solution. The total tuition for a JD program at a Cal-Accredited institution is less than half that of the state’s ABA-AALS Accredited schools, $65,709 compared to $148,673. Further, Cal-Accredited institutions in rural and quasi-rural locales tend to attract students from their surrounding areas and to send graduates back to serve those rural communities. The most recent graduate employment surveys of these Cal-Accredited institutions show that 86% of the graduates of both San Joaquin College of Law and Monterey College of Law are practicing in the rural or quasi-rural areas served by the institutions, and 100% of the graduates of Cal Northern School of Law are doing so. In the attorney desert that is Kings County, which has the worst attorney-to-resident ratio in the State, a full third of the members of the bar are graduates of the San Joaquin College of Law, located in neighboring Fresno County.

This phenomenon in turn raises the issue of the California Bar Exam “cut score,” the score required to pass the California Bar exam. The bar pass rate in California is notoriously low, and a 2018 study by the California Judiciary Committee suggested that lowering the cut score—and thus raising the bar pass rate—would not only increase the diversity of the profession, it could also serve to get more lawyers into the state’s rural reaches. California authorities have thus far, however, chosen not to alter the cut score.

5. Conclusion

California is a state with enormous resources, and it could do more to alleviate its rural attorney deficits and close the justice gap that falls across the rural-urban axis. But California is also a state in which rural people and rural interests have very little political capital. Indeed, following the 2016 Election, the collective clout of rural California has plummeted further in the context of a decidedly blue state. The cultural divide between rural and urban California thus grows sharper still, which does not bode well for the state’s rural reaches.

212 Admission and Discipline Systems Training, supra note ___ (this data point is at slide 35). See also Lisa R. Pruitt, Spreadsheet of Non-ABA-AALS Accredited Law Schools Information (on file with the Harvard Law School Library) (comparing total tuition and costs, tuition per unit, the total units needed to graduate, the number of students who have taken the California Bar Exam over a 5-year period, the number of those who have passed the exam over a 5-year period, the number of students who graduated in 2013, and the percentage of students employed in 2014, 2015, and 2016 for 35 non-ABA-AALS accredited law schools).


214 E-mail from Winick, supra note [213.]

215 E-mail from Alicia Wrest, Assoc. Academic Dean, San Joaquin College of Law, to Lisa R. Pruitt, Professor of Law, Univ. of Cal., Davis (Mar. 14, 2018 1:04 PM) (on file with the Harvard Law School Library).


One consequence of this rural marginalization is that few entering the legal profession in California appear interested in rural practice, and those who would seriously consider it are unlikely to undertake such an endeavor because of the strictures associated with student debt. Another consequence of California’s metrocentric attitudes is that institutional actors such as the State Bar, the California Assembly, and the state’s ABA-AALS Accredited law schools are unlikely to prioritize programs such as stipends or loan repayment assistance for rural lawyers in private practice. Yet such programs will probably be necessary to channel more lawyers to the state’s underserved rural reaches.

B. Georgia

Like many of its Southern counterparts, Georgia is more rural than the average state. More than 65% of Georgia’s 10.3 million residents live in places that are “rural” under the U.S. Census Bureau definition. Many residents in the state’s rural areas are poor, with few prospects for economic opportunity and upward mobility. Almost three-quarters of Georgia residents living below the federal poverty line reside outside of the five counties that constitute metropolitan Atlanta. Of the 353 persistent poverty counties in the United States—those with poverty rates of 20 percent or higher as measured by the Census in 1980, 1990, and 2000 and the five-year average of American Community Surveys in 2007-2011—49 were in Georgia, and 41 of those 49 were non-metro counties. Of those 49 counties, 18 were majority nonwhite in 2004.

Like many other states in the South—and unlike many of the other states surveyed in this article—a high proportion of Georgia’s rural population is disproportionately African-American. While the national percentage of the rural and small-town population that is African-American is 8.4 percent, 25.8% of Georgia’s rural and small-town population is African-American. To provide further contrast, the African-American rural and small-town population is 2.6 percent in California, and one percent or less in each of the other states surveyed.

Georgia is divided into 159 counties, nearly three times as many as California, a state with a population three times as great as Georgia’s. The average size of a Georgia County is just 374 square miles, about 13% of the size of an average California county, which is 2,822 square miles. More than half of Georgia’s counties have populations of fewer than 10,000 residents.

Although there are some stark differences, as noted above, like many of the other states discussed in this article, Georgia’s rural population is underserved. Several factors are responsible for the

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221 See supra tbl. 1.

222 Id. Table 1.

223 Kathryn Hayes Tucker, Rural Lawyer Shortage Concerns Leaders of the Legal Profession; Access to Justice: The Rural Lawyer Gap, DAILY REPORT (Jan. 8, 2015), https://www.law.com/dailyreportonline/almID/1202714375765 [https://perma.cc/3UML-JKAF] (“Metro Atlanta has 28 percent of the state’s population living below federal poverty limits, while the other 154 counties have 72 percent of the state’s poor.”).


225 RURAL POLICY RESEARCH INST., DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC PROFILE: GEORGIA 4 (July 2006) (based on data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service and the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 18 counties in Georgia in which the white population accounted for less than 50% percent of total population in 2004).


227 Id. at 10. The percentages in other Southern states are similarly high: Alabama (21.9%), Louisiana (31%), Mississippi (39.2%), and South Carolina (36.4%). Id.

228 Id.

229 Id. Table 7

230 Tables 1 and 7.

231 Table 7.

232 Table 7.
existence of legal deserts within Georgia. Most lawyers and legal services are concentrated within the metropolitan Atlanta area, leaving a dearth of lawyers and legal services outside that conurbation. Moreover, as the state bar greys, few young lawyers are willing to locate and practice in the state’s most rural areas. In addition, infrastructural factors—such as limited internet, vehicle, and public transportation access—create problems for those attempting to reach lawyers or represent themselves.

This section begins by providing background on the current resources available to address legal needs in rural parts of the state. It then describes how the number, geographic distribution, and changing demographic of attorneys in Georgia, in addition to other factors like access to transportation and the internet, have led to the creation of legal deserts across the state. Last, it discusses efforts taken or currently underway to address the access to justice gap in rural parts of the state and ways in which law schools and law students can help to close that gap.

1. Institutional Framework and Resource Allocation

Outside the Atlanta metro area, the primary provider of civil legal services for those who cannot afford an attorney is the Georgia Legal Services Program (GLSP). GLSP serves all 154 Georgia counties outside of the five core metro-Atlanta counties of Fulton, DeKalb, Clayton, Cobb, and Gwinnett. Currently, more than two million Georgians are eligible to receive legal aid from GLSP. In 2016, GLSP had 67 total lawyers on staff—57 lawyers serving legal aid clients (some on a part-time basis), three lawyers serving farmworkers across the state, and seven lawyers who either do not provide direct service to clients, or do so only in specialized fields.

Many of GLSP’s lawyers are responsible for covering several different counties, often at quite a distance. For example, just seven attorneys work in the Albany-Valdosta office, which is responsible for covering a 29-county area. Already serving a wide area across the southwest side of the state, the Albany office had to take on additional clients from southeast Georgia when GLSP closed its Valdosta office after the recession. GLSP lawyers staffing the office sometimes travel hundreds of miles in a day. As of 2015, there were 166,000 people living at or below the poverty level in the Albany-Valdosta service area; because GLSP will consider clients with incomes totaling up to 200% of the federal poverty level, the number of potential clients those seven lawyers might serve is significantly greater. According to Phyllis Holmen, former Executive Director of GLSP, every rural legal aid lawyer in Georgia “has 13,000 potential clients, based on the poverty population of the area they serve.”

For the 2018 calendar year, LSC awarded a total of just over $12 million dollars in grant funding to the two primary Georgia legal services providers, Atlanta Legal Aid Society and GLSP. Atlanta Legal Aid serves the five-county Atlanta metropolitan area, while GLSP is responsible for serving the

233 What We Do, GEORGIA LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAM, http://www.glsp.org/what-we-do/ ("Georgia Legal Services Program (GLSP) is a statewide non-profit law firm serving 154 counties in Georgia outside the five-county metropolitan Atlanta area. Those five counties are served by the Atlanta Legal Aid Society"). The Atlanta Legal Aid Society provides civil legal aid to low-income residents in Fulton, DeKalb, Gwinnett, Cobb, and Clayton counties.


235 See Memorandum from Holmen, supra note 235.

236 Id.

237 See id., supra note 235.

238 See Tucker, supra note 223.

239 See Id., supra note 235.

240 Tucker, supra note 223.

241 LSC 2018 Grant Award, LEGAL SERVS, CORP., https://www.lsc.gov/grants-grantee-resources/our-grant-programs/basic-field-grant/lsc-2018-grant-awards (click on “grant announcement and funding decision chart”)
rest of the state, including all of its rural population. For 2018, GLSP received $8,136,667 in LSC funding to support its basic field services and $266,288 to support its agricultural worker program.\footnote{Georgia Legal Services Program 2016 Annual Report 22, available at http://www.glsp.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/2016_Annual-Report.pdf.} That funding comprises a significant portion of GLSP’s budget: In 2016, LSC funding represented 61 percent of the organization’s income.\footnote{Judicial Council Committee Awards Grants for Civil Legal Services, JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF GA., ADMIN. OFFICE OF THE COURTS (July 6, 2017) http://georgiacourts.gov/content/judicial-council-committee-awards-grants-civil-legal-services [https://perma.cc/PFY6-A6KY].} The only state funding GLSP received in Fiscal Year 2018 was a grant of $1,607,352 to provide civil legal assistance to low-income victims of domestic violence and their children.\footnote{Tucker, supra note 223.} Yet GLSP remains the primary source of civil legal assistance for the 72 percent of the state’s poor that live outside metropolitan Atlanta.\footnote{Id.}

Although not specific to legal services, there is increased interest in Georgia in addressing the state’s rural areas. Georgia’s House of Representatives created a Rural Development Council during the 2017 legislative session to address the slowed economic recovery and population loss in rural parts of the state.\footnote{House of Representatives, Rural Dev. Council, Recommendations Overview 3 (2017), http://www.house.ga.gov/Documents/CommitteeDocuments/2017/HouseRuralDevelopmentCouncil/2017_FINAL_Recommendations.pdf [https://perma.cc/7JLR-E3XF].} One factor driving the need for such an entity is that 124 of Georgia’s 159 counties have experienced less than five percent growth over the last five years.\footnote{Tax breaks, fast internet proposed to bolster rural Georgia, ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION (Dec. 16, 2017, 10:05 AM) https://www.ajc.com/news/state-regional/tax-breaks-fast-internet-proposed-bolster-rural-georgia/Csmxv2epQs1wKZAnnPROM/ [https://perma.cc/JZ2E-SESW].} The Council issued a report in 2017 suggesting a number of recommendations for legislative action during the 2018 legislative session to, among other things, incentivize rural living (especially for professional, high-wage earners), increase broadband availability, encourage economic development, increase the number and quality of educational opportunities, and stabilize rural health systems.\footnote{House of Representatives, Rural Dev. Council, supra note 246, at 4–7.} Such efforts clearly demonstrate concern about the state’s rural areas and residents, yet we know very little about how individuals in these areas access and interact with the legal system. We also do not have empirical data on whether they have particular legal needs that remain unaddressed, or how the failure to address those needs may affect any number of the above areas, such as health, housing, and employment.

With respect to the state’s institutional framework and the potential for statewide reform, it is worth noting that in addition to having an abnormally high number of counties—159, second only to Texas,\footnote{See infra note 257 and accompanying text.} and nearly three times as many as California—Georgia’s state court system is decentralized.\footnote{See Judicial Council of Ga., Admin. Office of the Courts, Georgia Court Guide to Statistical Reporting 4 (Feb. 4, 2016), http://www.georgiacourts.org/sites/default/files/research/Georgia%20Court%20Guide%20to%20Statistical%20Reporting.v4%20r.pdf [https://perma.cc/9SNB-6UYU] (“Due to Georgia’s non-centralized court system, each class of court and their respective circuits, counties, and cities vary in their administrative structure.”).} As a result, each of the Georgia’s 919 trial-level courts\footnote{Your Guide to the Georgia Courts, JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF GA., ADMIN. OFFICE OF THE COURTS (May 2011), http://georgiacourts.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Guide%20to%20GA%20Courts2011.pdf [https://perma.cc/SJTJ-K6UF]. This includes trial-level courts operating throughout the state—magistrate, probate, juvenile, state, and superior courts—as well as municipal courts operating locally. Id.} may function in a slightly different manner. Access to justice reforms can thus be very difficult to implement or enforce uniformly across the entire state.

2. Community Legal Needs and Resource Shortfalls
To date, there has not been a specific assessment of legal needs in rural parts of the state. The most recent statewide legal needs assessment, conducted in 2007 and 2008, found that 62.2 percent of households experienced one or more civil legal problems in 2007, spanning several areas, including: consumer problems (22.3%), housing (15.8%), health (8.9%), employment (8.4%), public benefits (7.7%), education (6.3%), family (5.8%), and other problems. Legal and social service providers identified the most important needs experienced by their clients as housing (20.5 percent) and family (20 percent) law. Housing and family law needs were also the two areas in which assistance was most commonly sought, with consumer problems a close third. Most of the people encountering such legal problems did so without the assistance of an attorney—nearly three-quarters of respondents tried to resolve the issue on their own, 17.1 percent took no action at all, and only 9.1 percent were able to obtain help from an attorney.

While there is no specific research on how these needs may differ across urban and rural areas—if there is in fact such a difference—the resources available to address those needs vary greatly. The notable difference in access to legal services between Atlanta and Georgia’s more rural areas can be visualized on the map of access to justice metrics published by the Center for Access to Justice at Georgia State University College of Law in August 2017. The map—which was built in partnership with Dr. Joshua Weitz, Professor of Biological Sciences at Georgia Institute of Technology, and Chad Wigington, then a Ph.D. student in Bioinformatics—provides information regarding total population; the number of available legal services lawyers and active lawyers; and the percentage of county residents who speak no English at home, live at or below the poverty line, have no internet access at home, have no access to a household vehicle, and live within half a mile of public transportation.

![Image](https://perma.cc/XYF2-9Q5T)


**Id. Relative to its geographical area, Georgia has a disproportionately large number of counties. See 2010 Census: Georgia Profile, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/reference/guidestloc/13_Georgia.pdf [https://perma.cc/4FXG-6E4M]. After Texas, Georgia has the most counties out of any American state, despite being the twenty-first largest state by land area. Id.**

**See Center for Access to Justice: Research, GA. STATE UNIV. COLL. OF LAW [hereinafter Center Map], http://law.gsu.edu/center-access-justice/research/ [https://perma.cc/2T9Y-YD6A].**

**Id. Atlanta Legal Aid Society’s numbers include both county-specific lawyers as well as 22.5 additional attorneys who work for Atlanta Legal Aid on program-wide projects. E-mail from K. Verrill, Dir. of Grants and Innovation, Atlanta Legal Aid Soc’y, Inc., to Darcy McLean Meals (Feb. 7, 2017, 4:12 PM) (on file with the Harvard Law Library). For example, Cobb County has six attorneys, but its total also includes one-fifth of the program-wide attorneys. Id**

**See Georgia State Bar Lawyer Demographics Spreadsheet (Nov. 1, 2016) (on file with the Harvard Law School Library) (providing numerical breakdown of number of active lawyers in Georgia by county).**

**See America’s Civil Courts: Whom Do We Serve?, SELF-REPRESENTED LITIG. NETWORK https://srln.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/resources/tp/viewer/print/print.html?appid=7bed22dba4ec45f281b766181b862156 [https://perma.cc/9QSV-6H4R] (using 5-year estimates from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey from 2014).**

**See id.**

**See id.**

**See id.**

**See id.**

**See AllTransit Metrics, CENTER FOR NEIGHBORHOOD TECHNOLOGY, http://alltransit.cnt.org/metrics/ [https://perma.cc/7ZVG-2E8E]. (Enter a location name, e.g. Fulton County, Georgia, then click on “Equity” to see metrics relating to proximity to public transit. Note that the Center for Neighborhood Technology’s public transit data is only**
Perhaps the most obvious metric shedding light on access to justice—at least to those in the legal profession—is the number of attorneys available to provide representation if and when needed. The 154 counties that are not part of metropolitan Atlanta are home to sixty-five percent of the Georgia’s population, but only thirty percent of the state’s attorneys. In early 2003, the Georgia Bar reported having 26,936 active members, of which 18,000 resided within 60 miles of Atlanta. Forty percent worked in Fulton County alone, where the state’s capital is located. As of November 2016, sixty-four of Georgia’s 159 counties had ten or fewer active lawyers residing in the county, and thirty-two counties had five or fewer active lawyers. Five counties—Baker, Clay, Echols, Schley, and Webster—did not have a single resident who is an active attorney. Four out of those five counties without active attorneys are located in the southwest corner of the state. As demonstrated by the Center’s access-to-justice map, most of the Georgia counties with ten lawyers or fewer are surrounded by many other counties with the same characteristic, meaning that finding a lawyer in a neighboring county may also be difficult.

Various other factors—aside from the availability of an attorney, whether private or legal aid—can intersect to create a particularly challenging route to accessing justice. Consider two counties in the Albany-Valdosta service area, Clay County and Echols County, both of which are served by the Georgia Legal Services Program. Clay County, located in the southwest corner of the state along the Alabama border, has a population of just 3,183, of which nearly half are at or below the poverty level. The county’s population is 60% African-American and less than one percent of Hispanic or Latinx origin. There are no active lawyers in the county, where public transit is sparse and more than a quarter of the county’s population has no access to a vehicle. Home internet access in Clay County is nearly non-existent.

Echols County, located along the Florida border, is similar in size with a population of just over 4,000 residents and also has no active lawyers. In contrast to Clay County, 29 percent of Echols County is of Hispanic or Latinx origin, according to the Census. Public transportation is similarly lacking, although only five percent of households are without access to a vehicle. The two counties are vastly different, however, in terms of language access. Only 3.2 percent of Clay County’s residents do not speak English at home, while 26 percent of Echols County residents do not speak English at home, creating an additional barrier to justice.

consistently available for counties with more than 100,000 residents. Less populous counties may therefore reflect zero public transit even where it may be available.)

266 Tucker, supra note 223.
268 Id.
269 Id. Of the 64 counties with 10 active attorneys or fewer, African Americans constitute at least 40% of the population in 21 counties. All Counties in Georgia: Census 2010, CENSUSVIEWER, http://censusviewer.com/counties/GA [https://perma.cc/5H83-U99E].
270 Center Map, supra note Error! Bookmark not defined..
271 Center Map, supra note Error! Bookmark not defined..
272 It is also true that because Georgia is second highest nationally in number of counties, but not proportionally ranked in terms of land mass, see All Counties in Georgia: Census 2010, supra note 257, there may be instances in which a county with few lawyers is actually less isolated than it seems, given its geographic proximity to other counties.
273 See Center Map, supra note Error! Bookmark not defined..
275 See id.
277 See Population of Clay County, supra note 226.
278 See Population of Echols County, supra note 228. South Georgia has a significant farm economy, of which Echols County is a part. A 2012 Census of Agriculture lists 40 farms in Echols County, with the average farm size measuring 333 acres. Four farms in 2012 had sales of $500,000 or more. See 2012 Census of Agriculture, County Profile: Echols County, Georgia, U.S. DEP’T OF AGRIC.,
Aside from GLSP, these more rural counties have few resources to address the legal needs of low-income Georgians, at least in comparison with those available in more urban areas. Most legal non-profits and coordinators of pro bono legal services in Georgia are concentrated in the Atlanta metropolitan area. And there is little reason to think—at least in terms of the number of lawyers available—that the trend will change anytime soon. The lawyers practicing in more rural counties are getting older, consistent with the overall greying of the bar. Nationally, the median attorney age has risen from 39 in 1980 to 49 in 2005. Following that trend, as of August 2016, 57 percent of Georgia’s active lawyers were 45 or older. The number of Georgia lawyers nearing retirement age is increasing, especially in more rural parts of the state where lawyers are already in short supply.

Assuming that lawyers age 65 or older are retired or will soon retire, calculations from November 2016 demonstrate that 11 counties will not have any active lawyers and 40 counties will have five or fewer active lawyers; in total, 67 counties—or 42% of Georgia’s counties—will have 15 lawyers or fewer. Thus, the term “legal desert” will even more accurately describe large areas of the state. In rural areas of Georgia, baby boomer lawyers who manage solo practices are reluctant to retire because they struggle to find young lawyers who are ready and willing to succeed them in their practices. To innovate around this issue, the State Bar of Georgia’s Young Lawyer’s Division launched the Succession Planning Pilot Program in 2014, which connects retiring solo practitioners with new law graduates, facilitating the eventual succession in the management, and potentially ownership, of the practice.

Compounding the aging-out problem is the fact that younger lawyers graduating from law schools in Atlanta, Macon, and Athens are hesitant to relocate to rural areas to practice. This is in spite of the fact that Georgia’s law schools are some of the most affordable in the country—Georgia State Law topped National Jurist’s 2017 Best Value Law Schools ranking with tuition at $16,858 and average student debt below $65,000 (the University of Georgia ranked second, with tuition at $19,488 and average student debt just over $82,000). New lawyers’ uncertainty about the sustainability of a healthy law practice in such sparsely populated areas may be understandable. Mike Monahan, the pro bono director for GLSP and a former legal services lawyer in South Georgia, acknowledges that “[e]arning a living in a small town isn’t easy.” And while as of 2015, there were 1,300 volunteer lawyers available in rural Georgia available to assist indigent clients, attracting new law school graduates to rural communities with the hope that they will join existing law practices—or build and maintain new ones—has been difficult.

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https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Georgia/ep13101.pdf

https://www.georgialegalaid.org/

https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Georgia/ep13101.pdf

279 A general online resource hosted by legal aid organizations in Georgia provides information on a range of legal issues, in addition to forms and documents that can be used by self-represented litigants. See generally GEORGIALegalAID.ORG, https://www.georgialegalaid.org/ (relying on data gathered from The Lawyer Statistical Report, American Bar Association and the State Bar of Georgia Membership Department).

280 Id.


282 Id.

283 See Georgia State Bar Lawyer Demographics Spreadsheet, supra note __.

284 Id.

285 Id.

286 See Mike Stetz, Best Value Law Schools, THE NAT’L JURIST, Fall 2017, at 22

https://cdn.coverstand.com/52741/443086/c79fcbab7418071c3109ae535ca7b3e72e697aaf5.pdf

287 Tucker, supra note 223.

288 See id. Taier Perlman has explained the challenges that may face new attorneys contemplating rural practice: “[T]he challenges of solo or small firm practice are well documented, especially in rural areas, where professional isolation is very real and adds to a practitioner’s stress-levels. A lack of mentoring, professional development and networking opportunities is a major disadvantage. Not being able to talk through a legal issue with a peer, or check in with a mentor attorney more versed in an area of law, has a significant psychological impact. Further, rural attorneys face unique legal practice obstacles:
Retired Pataula Circuit Superior Court Judge Ronnie Joe Lane, former executive director of the Georgia Judicial Qualifications Commission, has tried to pitch law students on the benefits of rural practice—including a closer-knit community, lower-cost living, and an easier commute—without much success: “All they have to do is go home, keep the overhead low, rent the cheapest office they can find and hire a part-time secretary. . . . The problem is young lawyers don’t see it as a good opportunity.”

3. Policy Efforts to Confront Justice Challenges

Former State Bar President Patrise Perkins-Hooker attempted to address the rural attorney shortage in 2015 by calling on state legislators to enact the Attorneys for Rural Areas Assistance Act, which would have provided loan repayment assistance for young lawyers who “commit to working in rural communities for at least five years and to donate a portion of their services to poor clients.” Unfortunately, the attempt was unsuccessful.

Georgia is once again attempting to address the rural justice gap, this time through a recent Justice for All grant awarded to the state by the Public Welfare Foundation and the National Center for State Courts. Georgia was one of seven states—and the only state in the South—to receive the grant. The project provides support for state assessment and strategic planning efforts to ensure that everyone across the state has meaningful access to civil justice. Given limited legal resources across more rural parts of the state, one of the initiatives Georgia’s Justice for All task force has focused on is the use of law libraries to provide critical legal resources and advice. Laureen Kelly, a member of the Justice for All working group, runs the Dougherty County Law Library in Albany, Georgia, roughly 180 miles south of Atlanta. Albany is the regional hub for the southwest corner of the state, yet is not far from Clay County, and 32.4 percent of Dougherty County’s population is at or below the poverty level. The law library assists users from 25 counties, and many of those counties are legal deserts. Three of the neighboring counties served by the library, for example, have zero (Baker) and seven (Lee and Terrell) lawyers, respectively.

The Dougherty County Law Library is a free, public, and independent court-based resource for individuals seeking legal information. Library staff cannot provide legal advice to visitors, like how to interpret case law or how to proceed in court; instead, the staff offers visitors access to various more frequent conflicts of interests that arise when you are the only lawyer in town, substantial travel burdens (time and cost) for court appearances, the strain of running a general practice, and a client base that often cannot pay the full bill.
legal reference materials and specialized training on how to do online legal research. In addition to providing forms for unrepresented litigants in over fifteen different areas of civil law, the library website provides links to a robust toolkit of information, which includes a video on self-representation and discusses topics like “how to serve papers on [an] opposing party.” On the third Friday of every month, the Law Library holds a family law class to discuss common issues that arise in domestic disputes and provide general information on lawsuits and hearings. Currently, the law library provides a range of services to help self-represented litigants, including assistance with legal research, referrals to legal aid providers, some explanation regarding the legal process, and making a variety of print and electronic materials available for reference.

The services the law library provides are critical for those who need help when legal aid is at capacity, those who have legal needs that legal aid cannot address, and those who do not meet the income requirements to receive legal aid assistance but who also cannot afford a lawyer. Many of the people the library serves do not have computers or tablets, and many of them cannot read or write. And often they have other needs—such as unaddressed medical conditions—that can impede their ability to seek legal assistance. The Judicial Council of Georgia’s Access, Fairness, Public Trust and Confidence Committee has assumed responsibility for implementing the Justice for All Working Group’s plan to expand Kelly’s library and make its self-help resource center model a pilot project other counties can replicate.

Support for projects like the Dougherty County Law Library result from recognition that legal needs in rural areas may require solutions different from those often prioritized in more urban areas, such as the use of technology and online resources to bridge access to justice. Technology-based solutions may have more limited applicability in communities where such internet access is less readily available. And even when technology is available, people may not automatically turn to the internet as a source for legal assistance. The 2008 civil legal needs survey revealed that although roughly two-thirds of those surveyed had access to the internet, more than 94 percent of those surveyed had never used that resource to access legal forms online.

At the same time, given the paucity of lawyers living and working in more rural counties, it is unlikely that all of these individuals will be able to obtain direct legal representation to address their needs. Georgia Supreme Court Justice Nels Peterson, who also served on the Justice for All task force, recently endorsed a broader approach: “If we’re looking to expand access to justice, we have to think about access to justice as being more than access to a lawyer.”

Another possibility the Justice for All task force has explored would capitalize on the central role places of worship and religious leaders play in the everyday lives of Georgians. These individuals and entities can be trained to identify those issues that could benefit from legal assistance and then be equipped with referrals and self-help

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301 About the Dougherty County Law Library, supra note 299.
303 Georgia Justice for All Strategic Action Plan, supra note 297, at 19.
305 See id.
306 See id. (describing instance where Kelly provided food to a diabetic who nearly fainted from low blood sugar in the midst of dealing with a stressful legal problem).
307 See also Center Map, supra note 198, which demonstrates the low levels of home internet access available across the state.
308 See supra note 252 Error! Bookmark not defined., at 26.
309 See Tucker, supra note 250.
resources to address congregants’ needs. Like medical-legal partnerships, which have proven to be a successful model, such faith-based outreach efforts are premised on attempting to reach those in need of assistance where they are. One model for such a program is the Tennessee Faith and Justice Alliance (TFJA). Created by the Tennessee Supreme Court’s Access to Justice Commission in February 2013, TFJA is a collaborative effort among faith-based groups that seek to connect their members with volunteer lawyers in the community. According to the Alliance, “[t]he notion is to connect with people in need in a place they already go to seek help with a problem. That place is quite often their place of worship.” Research on the success of Tennessee’s program will be important to determine whether this is a model that can and should be replicated in other states.

A number of other Georgia initiatives could, in coming years, expand to address the rural access-to-justice problem. For example, the state recently launched a website hosted by the American Bar Association’s Free Legal Answers program that allows pro bono attorneys to answer legal questions that may arise in any part of the state. The Free Legal Answers program presumes access to the internet. Thus, those involved with the program are currently working to make additional computers available in libraries across the state to ensure that as many people as possible can access the service. Lawyers for Equal Justice, a legal incubator program established by the Georgia Supreme Court, the State Bar of Georgia, and the five ABA-Accredited law schools in Georgia, trains and supports recent law graduates to develop low-bono practices that can “provide quality legal services that are accessible and affordable.” Currently based in Atlanta, the program—and its graduates—could expand to cover other parts of the state, either by taking on cases remotely or creating satellite offices. In addition, some areas—like the Appalachian Judicial Circuit in northern Georgia—have had success with programs like the circuit’s Family Law Information Center (FLIC). Created in 2008 as a resource for low-income residents seeking assistance with family law issues such as divorce, child custody, legitimation, and contempt, FLIC provides self-represented litigants with free access to an attorney who can provide them with information and resources short of legal representation.

[310] See Bharath Krishnamurthy et al., What We Know and Need to Know about Medical-Legal Partnership, 67 S.C.L. REV. 377, 379 (2016) (“Through the medical-legal partnership approach, hospitals and health centers partner with civil legal aid resources in their community to: (1) train staff at the hospitals and health centers about how to identify health-harming legal needs; (2) treat health-harming legal needs through a variety of legal interventions; (3) transform clinic practice to treat both medical and social issues that affect a person’s health and well-being; and (4) improve population health by using combined health and legal tools to address wide-spread social problems, such as housing conditions, that negatively affect a population’s health and well-being.”).


[313] Id.

[314] See Free Legal Answers, AMERICAN BAR ASS’N, https://georgia.freelegalanswers.org/ [https://perma.cc/34XW-AG5D]. See also GEORGIALEGALAID.ORG, supra note 298 (providing general information on legal services, including for those who may not qualify for legal aid assistance).


4. Role of Legal Education

In addition to the above proposals, legal education and law students can play a greater role in Georgia to close the rural justice gap. Although Georgia’s law schools are based in more urban areas, programs like those hosted by the Center for Access to Justice at Georgia State University College of Law are attempting to increase students’ exposure to the need in such communities. The Center is engaging in new research that highlights rural access to justice issues, including a project undertaken in conjunction with Georgia Legal Services Program and faculty in Georgia State’s Sociology Department. Supported by a recent grant from the American Bar Endowment, the project will study evictions and individuals’ experiences with the eviction process and dispossessory court in semi-rural Georgia. The Center’s student-run Pro Bono Program hosts annual Alternative Spring Break trips, through which students spend a week learning about a substantive access to justice issue, like eviction defense or immigration detention, while also engaging in related pro bono service. In 2019, the Center plans to have one of its trips focus on access to justice in more rural parts of the state. The Center is also working with others at the law school to explore the creation of a rural externship program that would place students in rural communities over the summer with the hope that some of them may ultimately decide to practice there.

5. Conclusion

Georgia has much progress to make to ensure that individuals living in rural areas have access to resources that equip them to address their civil legal needs. As the above evidence demonstrates, there is a deep divide between metro Atlanta and the rest of the state when it comes to the ability to access justice. Renewed energy and support to increase the resources available to rural communities—including information, services, and self-help tools to address their legal needs—can narrow that gap and provide a clearer path to justice for rural Georgians.

C. Northeastern Minnesota and Northern Wisconsin

Identified locally as “the Northland,” the area spanning northeastern Minnesota and northern Wisconsin remains a largely unconsidered site for research on access to justice and rural attorney shortages. This state study explores the region comparatively, and for two reasons. First, the socioeconomic and spatial landscapes of northeastern Minnesota and northern Wisconsin in many ways resemble one another more prominently than they do their respective states’ southern and/or metropolitan areas. With a rugged woodland topography and substantial deposits of mineral ores, the economies of northern Minnesota and Wisconsin are largely based in extractive industries, manufacturing, tourism, and, to a lesser extent, farming. Both regions have relatively well-established East African, Hmong and Latinx communities, and there are seven Anishinaabe reservations in northern Minnesota and eleven federally-recognized tribes spanning the northern half of Wisconsin. Minnesota and Wisconsin are also two of the six mandatory states named in Public Law 280 (PL 280), which in 1953 shifted criminal jurisdiction away from a combination of tribal and

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318 See Pro Bono Program, GA. STATE UNIV., COLL. OF LAW, http://law.gsu.edu/center-access-justice/pro-bono-program/ [https://perma.cc/KTS3-8HYE].

319 Two exceptions are the Ho Chunk nation, which is headquartered in Black River Falls but also has trust land in the southern half of the state, and the Forest County Potowatami, who have off-reservation trust land near Milwaukee.

federal (Bureau of Indian Affairs) control to state and local government. This has resulted in complex and well-documented procedural uncertainties, jurisdictional and funding gaps, and conflicts between tribal and state authorities that uniquely confront legal practitioners in the Northland.

Secondly, northeastern Minnesota and northern Wisconsin are increasingly experiencing another commonality that largely sets the Northland apart, namely rising rates of poverty and unemployment. Between 2009 and 2014, Wisconsin’s poverty rate reached its highest in thirty years. With the exception of Milwaukee County, the state’s highest poverty rates are now concentrated in its rural northernmost counties. While Minnesota now has the second lowest poverty rate in the nation, its lowest median incomes have also come to be concentrated in the North—a marked change since 1999, when the poorest counties were scattered throughout the state. As in Wisconsin, unemployment across rural northern Minnesota has steadily increased, with particularly high rates in the northeastern Iron Range where in 2016 there were nearly 7,000 mining-related lay-offs. Across this context, the number of rural individuals who need and are income eligible for civil legal assistance (typically 125-200% of federal poverty guidelines) continues to grow.

While the northern portions of each state share similar geographies, demographics, and growing rates of poverty and unemployment, the types of political and funding supports for low-income rural residents and rural attorneys are markedly different. This section explores these institutional and political contexts first. It next discusses the legal needs and resource shortfalls that largely span but are differently addressed across the Northland region. Finally, it explores policy efforts to confront justice challenges across the Northland, both those administered at a formal state level, and those that are nascent and relatively informal.

1. Institutional Framework and Political Landscape

Despite the common characteristics of the Northland, there exists a growing political divide, one with particular salience to any effort aimed at contextualizing rural access to justice. In 2010, Wisconsin elected Republican governor Scott Walker and Republicans to majorities in the Legislature, whereas in Minnesota’s 2012 election, Democrats controlled the Legislature and every state constitutional office. In the years since, Minnesota’s efforts to legalize gay marriage, create the

321 While in theory tribal jurisdiction remains concurrent with state jurisdiction under PL 280, the withdrawal of federal responsibility and federal support for tribal law enforcement and criminal justice has left tribal governments with fewer opportunities to create tribal courts, police departments, and safety and justice programs that reflect their own goals and values. supra note 330, at 38.
322 These include the fact that the double jeopardy protections of the US Constitution and the Indian Civil Rights Act do not apply when those prosecutions are carried out by separate sovereigns, in this case the tribe and the state, as well as the absence of a clear federal rule of priority, supremacy, or coordination that structures relations between the coexisting state and tribal authorities. See Ross Naughton, State Statutes Limiting the Dual Sovereignty Doctrine: Tools for Tribes to Reclaim Criminal Jurisdiction Stripped by Public Law 280? 55 UCLA L. REV. 489, 494–95 (2007); CHAMPAGNE & GOLDBERG, supra note 321, at 23–24.
state’s Obamacare health insurance exchange, and raise taxes by $2.1 billion have been contrasted with Wisconsin’s end to collective bargaining rights for most public employees, rejection of a Medicaid expansion, cuts to public K-12 funding, and passage of restrictive anti-abortion and voter ID legislation. Of particular significance to this article, in 2011 Governor Walker eliminated Wisconsin state funding for civil legal aid. Minnesota, on the other hand, has steadily increased its legislative appropriation for civil legal services, reaching $13.1 million in FY 2017.

a. Northern Wisconsin

Because they receive no state tax dollars, Wisconsin’s two non-profit civil legal aid providers now rely largely on federal Legal Services Corporation (LSC) funding. Legal Action of Wisconsin, headquartered in Milwaukee, is projected to receive approximately $4.1 million in LSC funds in 2018. Wisconsin Judicare, Inc. (hereafter Judicare), located in north-central Wisconsin, will receive roughly $1 million. This breakdown, namely that Legal Action receives roughly 80% of the state’s LSC funding, is typical for the state: LSC funds are distributed on a per-capita basis according to each service area’s share of the eligible poverty population. For rural organizations that rely so heavily on LSC funding, this distribution formula proves consequential and arguably problematic.

Legal Action has six offices across the southern half of Wisconsin. Each is located in a metropolitan area and serves two to ten neighboring counties. Judicare, on the other hand, has just one main office and is the sole civil legal aid provider for Wisconsin’s northern 33 counties and 11 federally recognized tribes. Judicare’s share of the state’s eligible poverty population—and of the state’s population more generally—is considerably smaller than that covered by Legal Action of Wisconsin, but the vast and jurisdictionally complex geography it serves presents unique organizational costs that federal funding formulas do not necessarily anticipate. This is discussed in more detail below. Likewise, when it comes to supporting and referring the many potential clients it cannot take on due to funding constraints, Judicare has markedly fewer resources than its more metropolitan Legal Action counterparts, such as large local firms that may take on cases pro bono, or robust social service networks that can support individuals with complex legal and extra-legal needs.

Moreover, because of the state’s restricted funding context, both Legal Action and Judicare rely largely on federal and private grants that in many ways dictate the priorities of these organizations. In 2017, for instance, 7.6% of Judicare’s funding came from Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) grants and 10.4% from federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grants. While data identify access to healthcare, consumer, disability, family law and housing issues as the legal needs local Northland members themselves most urgently prioritize, in the absence of state tax dollars Judicare must focus its organizational agenda on the types of grant funding for which it is eligible.

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330 LSC 2018 Grant Award, supra note 258.
331 Id.
335 Data on file with the Harvard Law Library.
b. Northeastern Minnesota

Though Minnesota’s political model has been largely viewed as more effective in increasing jobs and improving business opportunities and living conditions,337 much of this success is attributed to the vitality of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area. Considerably less attention has been devoted to how the state’s rural areas have fared, particularly those in the north.

The current institutional and political landscape of Minnesota suggest its northeastern region has fared relatively well. Whereas Wisconsin legal aid receives no state tax dollars, Minnesota has steadily increased its legislative appropriation for civil legal services, reaching $13.1 million in FY 2017.338 Presently, northeastern Minnesota is served by (i) the Volunteer Attorney Program (VAP), which recruits private attorneys to provide pro bono services to individuals across northern Minnesota who fall under 200% of federal poverty guidelines; (ii) Anishinaabe Legal Services, which serves the Leech Lake, Red Lake, and White Earth reservations; and (iii) Legal Aid Service of Northeastern Minnesota (LASNEM), a non-profit law firm serving the eleven counties in northeastern Minnesota. Like Judicare, LASNEM’s service area is geographically expansive. Significantly, however, LASNEM has three main offices and two satellite offices spread across the region.339 The attorneys who staff these offices typically practice regularly in two or three district and tribal courts, allowing for consistency and rapport between legal aid advocates and court personnel. This is a marked contrast from northern Wisconsin’s complex jurisdictional and practice contexts, discussed below.

In addition to civil legal aid provision, a number of state initiatives are available to assist pro se clients, including LawHelpMN.org, a centralized website offering legal forms and online legal advice.340 The Minnesota Judicial Branch’s website also includes relevant forms and information, and there are county law libraries341 and Self Help Center workstations in every county courthouse across the state.342 Each workstation has a computer, phone, and printer, ostensibly enabling pro se clients to find legal information, print court forms, find assistance in completing court forms, and speak with Self Help staff over the phone. As one local attorney remarked, however, “access” does not necessarily safeguard “justice”: “You can simplify the formulaic process, but you don’t simplify the law.” An area judge added, “The issue isn’t getting people to the courts. The issue is getting people lawyers.”343

2. Community Legal Needs and Resource Shortfalls

Across a region defined by its geographic and socioeconomic similarities, and increasingly by its political differences, the aforementioned funding context powerfully influences attorneys’ efficacy and litigants’ access to justice. So also do the spatial expansiveness of district courts and practice areas; inconsistencies in organizational structures and processes; and the availability of rapport, trust, and individual attention.

338 See LEGAL SERVS. ADVISORY COMM., supra note 274, at 5.
343 Interview excerpt on file with Harvard Law Library.
a. Northern Wisconsin

In addition to limited funding, northern Wisconsin faces well-documented rural lawyer shortages which are accelerated by the area’s greying bar. Over 60 percent of the state’s attorneys practice law in major urban areas, leaving some counties in rural Wisconsin with attorney-to-resident ratios as high as 1:4.452. Across the northern half of the state, only 6 of the 40 attorneys in Vilas County are under the age of 50. and Florence and Pepin counties have no lawyers under 50. Oconto County has two, and no new attorneys have moved into the county in the last decade. Nine counties in northern Wisconsin have ten or fewer active attorneys.

These shortages have immediate impacts on northern Wisconsin’s civil legal aid attorneys, discussed below. They also have urgent consequences for northern Wisconsin more broadly, where rising rates of opioid and meth addiction are resulting in an ever-increasing number of criminal cases. The shortage of local lawyers to take up these public defender cases is compounded by the fact that the state currently pays the lowest rate in the country for court-appointed attorneys. A proposed bipartisan bill aims to raise these payments, but for now, the absence of local lawyers, and of private attorneys across Wisconsin who are unwilling to accept a low hourly rate and an even lower travel rate for up to five hours of driving time one-way, has resulted in a backlog of cases. It can take up to eight weeks to assign a public defender after being arrested—a gap that leaves people who are addicted to opioids or meth in a high-stress situation, lengthening delays for treatment and often resulting in re-offense.

Wisconsin’s rural shortages also impact the efficacy and reach of civil legal aid provision. As a judicare program, Wisconsin Judicare, Inc. has historically relied on the participation of the private, decentralized bar. Yet because of attorney retirements—and correspondingly heavier workloads for the attorneys who remain in these regions—fewer private attorneys are now willing or able to take on “low bono” Judicare cases. They are even less likely to accept the pro bono cases that Wisconsin Judicare, Inc. increasingly refers owing to its constrained funding sources and diminished ability to provide funds to partnering attorneys. In response, Judicare has hired more staff attorneys. This

347 Id.
348 Id.
349 Kaeding, supra note 288.
353 See Coutu, supra note 351.
354 Id.
355 Designed to ensure that low-income clients have freedom to choose their counsel and that the client is defended as vigorously as a private fee-paying client, the Judicare model directs federal or state funds to private attorneys who provide free legal services to low-income clients. See generally Michael A. Millemann, Diversifying the Delivery of Legal Services to the Poor by Adding a Reduced Fee Private Attorney Component to the Predominantly Staff Model, Including Through a Judicare Program, 7 U. MD. L.J. RACE, RELIGION, GENDER, AND CLASS 227 (2007).
transition has helped address certain concerns, but it has also illuminated a host of other professional challenges in mitigating rural civil legal need.

For one, there is high turnover at Judicare due to relatively low salaries and limited local job opportunities for spouses or partners, and many of Judicare’s new staff attorneys are recent law school graduates. The resulting lack of experience and continuity in Judicare staffing has resulted in diminished familiarity and trust between Judicare attorneys, who are based in Wausau, and clients across counties and reservations stretching as far as 200 miles away. Secondly, because Wisconsin’s northern county courts are relatively geographically isolated, some, though certainly not all, ascribe to internal norms and filing processes that may be familiar to local attorneys but are often unclear and frustratingly inconsistent to legal aid advocates who must work across so many court systems.

Unaware of local practices, less experienced attorneys struggle to establish rapport with circuit court commissioners356 and judges, and some advocates describe certain northern county courts or court personnel as openly hostile to attorneys perceived as “outsiders” due to their age, professional experience, regional background, and, for women in particular, gender.357 At its worst, this undermines advocacy efforts on behalf of low-income individuals and compounds the demands already faced by rural legal aid. Of course, noted one female attorney, at its best, “[the judge and opposing counsel] underestimate me, and I get a good result.”358

However indirectly, the experiences of Judicare’s new staff attorneys underscore how uniquely well-suited the Judicare model was, and could potentially still be, in addressing the legal needs and complex court structures of northern Wisconsin. As evidenced in the success of Judicare’s work through a decentralized private bar359 — i.e., attorneys who are familiar with and to local court systems—and the well-established presence of Judicare’s Indian Law Office in the state’s tribal communities,360 any initiative to recruit and retain rural attorneys in northern Wisconsin must acknowledge the significance of trust, rapport, transparent court procedures, and being locally “known.” How this is established, let alone sustained, amidst limited funding, overburdened attorneys, distinctive court systems, and a geographically expansive region remains a significant question.

b. Northeastern Minnesota

Like Wisconsin, Minnesota faces its own rural attorney shortages—and, notably, a shortage of judges.361 Rural Minnesota also contends with a greying bar,362 with northeastern Minnesota in

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357 See, e.g., redacted interview on file with the Harvard Law Library. Similar sentiments and experiences are evidenced in Trish Mundy’s work studying the Australian experience, Women in ‘Rural’ Practice: Opportunities, Challenges and Strategies to Thrive, in THE PLACE OF PRACTICE: LAWYERING IN RURAL AND REGIONAL AUSTRALIA 64–80 (Trish Mundy et al. eds., 2017). Note that the self-identified male-to-female ratio of Wisconsin state bar members is almost consistently 2:1 across the state. See Membership Statistics, ST. B. Wts. (2018), https://www.wisbar.org/aboutus/overview/Pages/Member-Statistics.aspx [https://perma.cc/F7D6-7FCH].
358 Redacted interview on file with Harvard Law Library.
361 Perhaps unsurprisingly, recruiting judges and judicial staff to “Greater Minnesota” (commonly contrasted with “Metropolitan Minnesota”) is a challenge owing to stagnant pay and the high and diverse demands that a judge who handles nearly every case in her or his district faces. See Briana Bierschbach, With a shortage of judges looming, judicial branch looks to bump salaries in Minnesota, MINNPOST (Feb. 14, 2017), https://www.minnpost.com/politics-policy/2017/02/shortage-judges-loomming-judicial-branch-looks-bump-salaries-minnesota [https://perma.cc/K9SB-4KKJ].
particular projected to experience population decline and an unprecedented increase in the age 65 and older population group.363 At the same time, the likelihood of those who are income eligible for legal services actually receiving legal assistance—as well as those who are ineligible as being nominally above the federal poverty guidelines, often referred to as “working poor”364—is considerably higher in Minnesota.365 This is particularly significant in light of the precarious workforce of northeastern Minnesota’s largely mining-based economy,366 one in which families transition in and out of poverty following the “boom and bust” of mines and indirectly-related employment, such as welding, daycare provision, and food service.367 Minnesota’s ability to offer some outreach to those who are and who are not financially eligible for pro bono legal services—yet who still cannot afford a private attorney—owes to available funding, of course, and to collaborative commitments by local and state bar associations. One instance of this is the Statewide Low Fee Family Law Project, which provides reduced fee family law services to potential clients who are currently employed or on Social Security and have an income between 125-250% of the federal guidelines.368 While evidencing meaningful and arguably rare attention to the limitations of most funding guidelines, currently the Low Fee Family Law Project only serves “the Metro,” which consists of the counties of and surrounding the Twin Cities—Hennepin, Ramsey, Dakota and Anoka Counties.369

Other discrepancies between “the Metro” and northeastern Minnesota courts uniquely impact the efficiency and efficacy of legal aid attorneys. For instance, most Minnesota counties offer Early Neutral Evaluation (ENE), which is the involvement of a judicial officer in order to aid in a case’s earlier resolution.370 A voluntary process, ENE is designed to facilitate dispute resolution in custody and visitation matters (Social ENE) and financial matters (Financial ENE).371 Although Hennepin and Ramsey Counties, where Minneapolis and Saint Paul are located, have Family Court Services divisions with paid staff to conduct ENEs, the remainder of the state’s counties refer out to the private sector.372 Accordingly, many rural county courts offer only limited ENE hours. Others have stopped

Association (MSBA) on retiring attorneys in “outstate” Minnesota, there are presently no conclusive data on Minnesota county by county bar membership, age, or recruitment efforts.


368 See Statewide Low Fee Family Law Project, supra note 310.

369 See Hennepin County Bar Association Low Fee Family Law Project, MINNESOTA HELP, https://www.minnesotalawhelp.info/Providers/Hennepin County Bar Association/Low Fee Family Law Project/?returnUrl=%2FspecialTopics%2FYouth%2F24741%3F [https://perma.cc/7GRG-RAG2] (“Clients must meet financial eligibility guidelines and have a Family Law matter in Hennepin, Ramsey, Dakota or Anoka County.”).


371 Id.

providing ENE altogether because they view it as ineffective or too costly for involved parties.\textsuperscript{373} For legal aid attorneys, the consequences of such regional variances are significant: “Your strategy is totally different if that procedural component isn’t built in,” noted one attorney. “It affects your ability to practice and your style of practice if you’re working in different county courts.”\textsuperscript{374} As in Wisconsin, these procedural inconsistencies uniquely impact the work of rural civil legal aid attorneys who must practice across long distances, some as far as 150 miles one way, and across diverse courts.

3. Policy Efforts to Confront Justice Challenges Across the Northland

For now, local and state efforts to mitigate justice gaps in northern Minnesota and Wisconsin are relatively promising. These efforts occur both because of and sometimes in spite of area law schools. Of the five law schools located in Minnesota and Wisconsin, none offers any formal curricular offerings or incentivized programs for students interested in rural practice—and all face declines in enrollment.\textsuperscript{375} At the same time, a number of these law schools collaborate on initiatives that expose students to rural legal practice and serve low-income rural community members. In Wisconsin, the state bar association recently developed the Greater Wisconsin Initiative Bus Tour in conjunction with a number of county bar associations and the Marquette University and University of Wisconsin law schools.\textsuperscript{376} The bus tour introduces law students and recent law school graduates to the nature of rural practice and small-town living and has helped Judicare in its recruitment efforts.\textsuperscript{377} Local members of the private bar are likewise enthusiastic about the potential of this initiative, though they highlight more complex regional deterrents to the recruitment and retention of attorneys, particularly those with families.\textsuperscript{378} Most prominent among these is the rapidly diminishing quality of local education, particularly as rural Wisconsin school districts contend with disproportionately high rates of inexperienced teachers in the wake of Act 10\textsuperscript{379} and with state funding tied to student enrollment amidst general population declines.\textsuperscript{380}

\textsuperscript{373} Counties Using Initial Case Management Conferences (ICMC) and Social and/or Financial Early Neutral Evaluation (ENE), MINN. JUDICIAL BRANCH, (June 2016), http://www.mncourts.gov/mncourts/gov/media/tenth_district/ENE%20documents/ICMC-ENE_StateMap_2016June-rotated.pdf [https://perma.cc/2AM7-4ES8]. One area judge described ENE as rife with unstated pressures and “deal-making” that are particularly conspicuous in rural courts. “These are the subtle biases of [the ENE] system, the unstated but unethical premise that a local lawyer can make to the client: ‘Hey, I’m part of the system, and if you’re not going to agree to make a deal here in mediation, then my credibility is at stake.’ . . . And all the lawyers are trained in mediation. With ENE, you’ve got to bring in another one. So the lawyers here make deals, ‘I’ll pick you on this case; you pick me for yours.’” (Redacted interview excerpt on file with Harvard Law Library).

\textsuperscript{374} (Redacted interview excerpt on file with Harvard Law Library).

\textsuperscript{375} See Burl Gilyard, The legal market is changing. Can Minnesota’s law schools adapt? MINNPOST (June 20, 2016), https://www.minnpost.com/twin-cities-business/2016/06/legal-market-changing-can-minnesota-s-law-schools-adapt [https://perma.cc/5LQ7-3D68]. Wisconsin’s two law schools are the University of Wisconsin Law School (Madison) and Marquette University Law School (Milwaukee). In Minnesota, the law schools are the Mitchell Hamline School of Law (St. Paul), the University of St. Thomas School of Law (Minneapolis), and the University of Minnesota Law School (Minneapolis).


\textsuperscript{378} See e.g., redacted interview excerpt on file with the Harvard Law Library.

\textsuperscript{379} Wisconsin’s 2011 Act 10 effectively eliminated collective bargaining rights for public school teachers, mandated steep cuts in district pension and health care contributions, and prohibited forced payment of union dues for members. This posed particular challenges to rural districts, which have since struggled to pay more to retain teachers. Indeed, one out of four rural teachers had taught for fewer than five years in 2015-16. Madland, David and Alex Rowell. Attacks on Public-Sector Unions Harm States: How Act 10 Has Affected Education in Wisconsin. Center for American Progress Fund. 11/15/2017. https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/sites/2/2017/11/15074954/ImpactofWisconsinAct10-brief.pdf. See also

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Other efforts to increase access to justice in rural Wisconsin include a bill recently proposed by the state legislature to provide student loan payments on behalf of lawyers who represent rural low-income criminal defendants and Judicare’s own Northern Wisconsin Legal Advice Project (NWLAP), an online legal advice program implemented in 2015 and staffed by a Judicare attorney, a paralegal, and volunteer attorneys. Through NWLAP, eligible clients, i.e., those who lived and had legal problems venued in one of Wisconsin’s northern 33 counties and were defined as low-income based on federal poverty guidelines, could submit a legal question online and receive a customized response from a participating attorney. The program was later adopted by the state’s Access to Justice Commission and is now part of the American Bar Association’s Free Legal Answers project. Some county bar associations also offer regular in-person clinics staffed by local volunteer attorneys to help pro se litigants.

Additionally, a volunteer attorney with Judicare recently (2017) established a mediation services project in Marathon County, where the Judicare office is located, with the goal of expanding into each of the northern 33 counties Judicare serves. While a nascent effort, the program has so far been well-received by community members and members of the local bar, both for the assistance it provides to those who do not qualify for legal aid, as well as for the assistance it offers strained county courts—especially those inundated with criminal cases owing to the Northland’s aforementioned opioid and meth epidemics.

At the same time, and in a sense reflecting the patchwork quality of Wisconsin’s justice system more generally, it is worth underscoring that many of the initiatives occur on a county-by-county basis. Only a handful of counties participate in the Greater Wisconsin Initiative Bus Tour, and only some counties offer direct assistance to pro se litigants. Additionally, some of the most potentially successful programs, such as the mediation services project, have depended exclusively on a champion—one individual with the time and social capital to implement new initiatives. The extent to which these projects are sustainable or replicable remains to be seen.

Given Minnesota’s relatively robust funding context, it is able to offer comparatively more formal programs to assist low-income rural clients and contend with attorney shortages. For instance, in reviewing civil legal aid service and funding levels by county, Minnesota Legal Services Advisory Committee (LSAC) found resource disparities in rural private attorney involvement (pro bono and judicare).

Unlike Wisconsin’s, LSAC’s response was—and could be—remarkably nimble, with a change to regional funding structures and additional grants offered to the regions of the state with


Vielmetti, *supra* note 352.

Wise Access to Justice Commission, WISATJ, [http://wisatj.org/](http://wisatj.org/) (last visited May 5, 2018). Wisconsin’s Access to Justice Commission was created by the state’s Supreme Court at the request of the State Bar of Wisconsin and has consistently expressed an interest in rural Wisconsin. At least four of the Commission’s 17 current members live and/or practice in northern Wisconsin counties and tribal communities. In 2017, the Commission invited the author to present her initial findings at their December meeting.

*See Wisconsin Free Legal Answers, WISCONSIN ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSION, [http://wisatj.org/projects/wisconsin-legal-advice-online](http://wisatj.org/projects/wisconsin-legal-advice-online) (last visited May 5, 2018); See also Georgia, *Free Legal Answers, supra* note 263.

*See, e.g., Wisconsin Family Justice Clinic Homepage, WFJC, [http://www.ernestromero.net/WFJC.htm](http://www.ernestromero.net/WFJC.htm) (last visited May 5, 2018).


*Redacted interview excerpt on file with Harvard Law Library.

rural attorney shortages.\textsuperscript{388} Other initiatives include the Minnesota Justice Foundation’s Pro Se Clinics, which are staffed by law students and attorneys and are hosted by area organizations, including Anishinaabe Legal Services in northeastern Minnesota.\textsuperscript{389} These clinics, along with the state’s other self-help initiatives, discussed above, are critically important: Among those states reporting civil cases involving self-help litigants, Minnesota had the highest rate in the nation in 2015.\textsuperscript{390} In 2016, 81.6\% of civil cases in Minnesota involved self-help litigants.\textsuperscript{391}

4. Conclusion

This study offers a relatively cursory overview of two complex state contexts. As such, many of the nuanced differences in rural legal needs across counties and reservations, as well as efforts to address these needs, are only summarily discussed. At the same time, however, this comparative perspective offers a unique window on how one region, the Northland, is variously impacted by state political structures and funding mechanisms, attorney and judge shortages, the greying bar, and area law schools. It also demonstrates the intricate challenges that rural attorneys daily navigate in the Northland, including diverse jurisdictional contexts, expansive practice areas, and, as ethnographic data evidence, more subtle but no less consequential procedural inconsistencies and conflicting interpretations of “access to justice.” Yet as this study also demonstrates, much of the informality that characterizes the Northland legal context also lends itself to creative, relevant, and efficient professional and state responses to rural legal deserts.

D. Maine

Maine’s varying landscape features some 3,400 miles of rocky coastline\textsuperscript{392} and a mountainous terrain that is more than 90 percent forested.\textsuperscript{393} Given these aspects of the state’s physical geography, it is perhaps not surprising that Maine is sparsely populated, with 1.34 million people\textsuperscript{394} residing across 31,000 square miles.\textsuperscript{395}

Maine is divided into 16 counties, but the two southernmost ones—Cumberland and York, across which the Greater Portland Metropolitan Area sprawls—claim a disproportionate, 40\% share of the population.\textsuperscript{396} Many of the remaining counties—especially in the state’s northern and interior

\textsuperscript{388} Id.
\textsuperscript{390} Hannah Covington, Help is just a walk-in center away for those braving the legal system without an attorney, STAR TRIB. (Apr. 3, 2017), http://www.startribune.com/minnesota-courts-work-to-keep-up-with-do-it-yourself-demand/418026573/ [https://perma.cc/V9VA-4F8L].
\textsuperscript{393} See FAQs About Maine’s Forests, FORESTS FOR ME.’S FUTURE http://www.forestsformainesfuture.org/forest-facts/ [https://perma.cc/A5MB-FS8F].
\textsuperscript{396} See World Population Review, available at http://worldpopulationreview.com/states/maine-population/ [last visited May 13, 2018]. Just under half a million residents live in Cumberland and York Counties. All 16 counties feature rural and regional communities, while the 14 counties other than Cumberland and York also include remote communities.
reaches—are confronting challenges associated with population loss and low population density. Even Kennebec County, home to the state capital, Augusta, has been losing population in recent years. With a population density of just 43 persons per square mile, Maine is the least densely populated state not only in New England, but indeed among all states east of the Mississippi River.

This state study begins by providing background on Maine’s demographic and political challenges, focusing on net population decline among an aging, predominantly white population. It then describes how the number, geographic distribution, and changing demographic of attorneys in Maine has led to the creation of legal deserts in 14 of the state’s 16 counties. Penultimately, it discusses both historical efforts taken and present efforts currently underway to address the access to justice gap in Maine, in general, and rural parts of the state, specifically. Finally, the study concludes with a description of the University of Maine School of Law’s responses, along with that of its students, to the legal service needs of people residing in rural parts of Maine.

1. Institutional Framework and Political Landscape

Physical geography and population density are only part of Maine’s story. The state faces compelling demographic challenges, most notably a population that ranks “annually among the oldest and whitest states in the nation.” Maine’s population in 2018 was 1,341,582, up by just more than 10,000 residents since 2016. Over 40% of the population resides in rural communities. Ethnic and racial minority populations vary between rural and urban counties in Maine. For example, Black and Asian populations tend to account for most of the minority population in Cumberland and Androscoggin Counties. Native Americans tend to account for most of the non-white population in Washington and Aroostook Counties. The poverty rate in rural communities in Maine is over 15%, 2.6% higher than the state average.

Maine’s demographic trends are cause for concern. These trends include the loss of younger residents, declining in-migration, declining municipal and state revenue tax bases, public school closures or reduction in faculty size due to depopulation, and an aging labor force approaching

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397 See Quick Facts Maine, supra note 413. Data show that the majority of counties have experienced population declines since 2010, with the exception of some of the state's southernmost counties, which reported minor growth. Just five counties experienced population growth between the time of the US Census in 2010 and estimates taken by the Census Bureau in 2015. Of these five counties, Cumberland had the highest growth rate of 3.03%. Trailing behind are York County at 2.01%, Waldo County at 0.87%, Hancock County at 0.53%, and Knox County at 0.35%. On the other end of the spectrum, there were multiple counties that showed declining populations, particularly in the northernmost counties. Aroostook County posted the greatest loss of 4.31%. Its neighbor, Washington County, saw a decrease of 3.65%, and Piscataquis saw a decrease in population of 3.51%. Other counties moving south also saw smaller losses, including Somerset, Oxford, and Lincoln.

398 Id.
399 See id.
402 See id.
404 Table 3.
retirement.\textsuperscript{405} Losing the younger demographic in Maine to out-migration results in lower birth rates; notably, the median age has increased from 37.7 to 44.2 years.\textsuperscript{406}

An important nuance of the state’s anemic net population growth is that Maine’s foreign-born population accounts for a significant portion of this meager growth.\textsuperscript{407} So while Maine’s population is growing due to in-migration and births in foreign-born populations, overall, the state is nevertheless experiencing natural population loss, meaning the deaths outpace the births\textsuperscript{408} This is broadly consistent with national trends: since 2010 nearly 93\% of American population growth has come from racial and ethnic minorities; as such, it appears that attracting members of ethnic and racial groups to Maine is a key political and economic issue.\textsuperscript{409} Maine is thus challenged to retain its younger population, support its older population, and attract members from diverse ethnic and racial groups.

Maine is challenged to respond to the professional service needs of each of these segments of the population, needs that are especially acute in rural communities. Maine must consider that a significant percentage of its population—Mainers and newcomers alike—may be drawn to the state’s rural reaches because of the existence of agricultural employment and the Agricultural Creative Economy,\textsuperscript{410} affordable housing, low-crime environments, and below-capacity use of public infrastructure.\textsuperscript{411} In mapping the political landscape and the potential opportunities for sustaining and repopulating rural communities, developing pathways to access affordable legal services is critical.

2. Maine’s Legal Needs and Resource Shortfalls

In 1990, the Maine Commission on Legal Needs, chaired by the late Senator Edmund S. Muskie (Muskie Commission), found that legal aid providers in Maine were only able to meet the needs of 23\% of the people eligible for and in need of their services.\textsuperscript{412} A 2009 study found that the needs of 24\% of the people eligible for and in need of services were met. An informal assessment, conducted in 2012, found that the needs of just 20\% of the people eligible for and in need of services were met. The availability of civil legal services for Mainers challenged by poverty has sunk to perilous levels due to sharp declines in both federal- and state-funded civil legal aid.

In Maine, Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Inc. (Pine Tree) is the only service provider funded by the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). For 2018, Pine Tree will receive a total of $1,477,918 to be allocated to basic field work ($1,160,297), in support of Agricultural Workers ($251,792), and in support of Native Americans ($65,829). With a resource-sharing model developed by the Justice Action Group (JAG)\textsuperscript{413} and administered by the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund Commission.

\textsuperscript{405} See Robert W. Glover, The Role of Immigrants, Asylum Seekers, and Refugees in Confronting Maine’s Demographic Challenges, 25:1 ME. POL’Y REV. 47, 49 (2016); RICHARD BARRINGER ET AL., GREATER PORTLAND TOMORROW: CHOICES FOR SUSTAINED PROSPERITY, 43 (Sep. 15, 2017), http://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/muskie/8/ [https://perma.cc/26T4-ALW7]; Penelope Overton, Maine’s population growth still stagnant, new census numbers show, PRESS HERALD (May 19, 2016), https://www.pressherald.com/2016/05/19/maines-population-trickles-higher-reaching-nearly-1-33-million/ [https://perma.cc/JJM8-CERX].

\textsuperscript{406} Glover, supra note 412, at 48.

\textsuperscript{407} See id. at 49. See also Barringer, supra note 412, at 43; Overton, supra note 412.

\textsuperscript{408} Glover, supra note 412, at 48–49.

\textsuperscript{409} Glover, supra note 412, at 48–49.

\textsuperscript{410} See ME. DEPT’T OF AGRIC., THE AGRICULTURAL CREATIVE ECONOMY STUDY (2008), http://digitalmaine.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=ard_docs [https://perma.cc/XHB4-M4HF].


\textsuperscript{412} See JUSTICE ACTION GRP., ACCESS TO JUSTICE: THE STATE OF ACCESS TO CIVIL JUSTICE IN MAINE (Feb. 2014), https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_aid_indigent_defendants/ATJReports/ME_2014_Report_authcheckdam.pdf [https://perma.cc/6NM2-287S] (stating the revelations of the 1990 Maine Commission on Legal Needs, chaired by Senator Edmund s. Muskie that “roughly 75\% of the litigants in the civil justice system are not represented by counsel. Virtually all of these individuals are unable to pay for an attorney. . . . ”); see also Hon. Howard Dana, Legal Aid and Legal Services: An Overview, 67 ME. L. REV. 276 (2015).

\textsuperscript{413} See infra note xxx, and accompanying text.
pursuant to statute, seven of Maine’s legal services providers—including Pine Tree—receive a percentage allocation of state funds generated from minimal filing fees on certain civil legal cases.\footnote{See Calien Lewis, *How Volunteers Saved Legal Aid in the 1990s*, 11.1 ME. POL’Y REV. 44–47 (2002).} Thus, the two primary sources of state support for civil legal aid in Maine are the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund ("MCLSF")\footnote{ME. REV. STAT. ANN. tit. 4, § 18-A (West, Westlaw, through end of 128th Reg. Sess. (2017)).} and the Interest on Lawyers’ Trust Accounts ("IOLTA") program.\footnote{Rule 6(a) of the Maine Bar Rules. *Rule 6, Bd. of Overseers of the Bar*, http://mebaroverseers.org/regulation/bar_rules.html?id=638764 [https://perma.cc/B4KX-SX9Y].} Both the MCLSF and IOLTA have experienced dramatic declines in revenue in recent years. Between FY 2008 and FY 2013, the combined annual state support for civil legal assistance in Maine declined by 29%.\footnote{See supra note 9.}

As the funding and staffing have decreased, the number of people served by Maine’s major legal aid providers fell by nearly 10% in the total number of people served by Maine’s major legal aid providers between 2009 and 2012.\footnote{In 2016, the number of resident attorneys decreased by six for a total of 3,939. See BD. OF OVERSEERS OF THE BAR, 2016 ANNUAL REPORT, http://www.mebaroverseers.org/about/pdf/2016%20Annual%20Report.pdf [https://perma.cc/263J-YC56].}\footnote{See id.} During this same period, the number of Mainers living in poverty in Maine has increased by 15%, which increased the need for civil legal services.\footnote{See Rule 6(a) of the Maine Bar Rules. *Rule 6, Bd. of Overseers of the Bar*, http://mebaroverseers.org/regulation/bar_rules.html?id=638764 [https://perma.cc/B4KX-SX9Y].} The erosion of U.S. congressional support for the LSC, coupled with the restrictions on the type of clients and services LSC grantees can provide,\footnote{See infra Table 3.} undermines the ability of legal services providers to meet the need. The decline in IOLTA revenue due to low interest rates and the limited funds distributed through the MCLSF aggravate the situation.

These unmet civil legal needs are exacerbated when people living in rural communities do not have access to an attorney—whether due to limited access to legal aid attorneys, too few private attorneys, or the aging out of attorneys in rural communities. In 2013, resident attorneys—those living and practicing in Maine—was just under 4,000.\footnote{See infra note 536.} By 2016, the net decrease in Maine’s attorney count was in the single digits, but data revealed a quickly aging Bar: 19% of those attorneys were over the age of 65, 28% were aged 55-64, and fewer than 12% were below the age of 35.\footnote{See id.} Moreover, newly admitted members of the bar between the ages of 25 and 34 "are working and living primarily in the Greater Portland and other more populous areas in the state, the result being dwindling numbers of lawyers in rural counties."\footnote{See BD. OF OVERSEERS OF THE BAR, REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE BOARD OF OVERSEERS OF THE BAR’S TASK FORCE TO STUDY BAR DEMOGRAPHICS (Jun. 2014), http://www.mebaroverseers.org/DemographicsTaskForce/Docs/Task%20Force%20Report%20-%206.6.14.pdf [https://perma.cc/V728-MNW8].} The data thus suggest that the availability of lawyers in Maine’s rural communities is in sharp decline, leaving no question that access-to-justice challenges are imminently facing some parts of the state.\footnote{See id.} The unmet needs in rural communities range from complex family law matters involving family violence, substance abuse, mental illness, and conflicting jurisdiction to immigration legal assistance, foreclosure proceedings, and consumer debt matters.

Some county-level detail puts a finer point on the access-to-justice crisis created by the confluence of an aging bar and the clustering of younger lawyers in the state’s southernmost counties.

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\footnote{See also *Brennan Ctr. For Justice, Civil Legal Services: Low-Income Clients Have Nowhere to Turn Amid the Economic Crisis* (Jun. 25, 2010), https://www.brennancenter.org/page/-/Justice/CLS/LSC-%20New%20Need%20Memo.pdf [https://perma.cc/5YXY-655E].}
Only six lawyers serve Central Maine’s Piscataquis County (population just over 17,000),426 and none of them is under the age of 40.427 Little better is West Central Maine’s Franklin County (population 30,000),428 which has 24 lawyers but only two under the age of 40.429 Downeast’s Washington County430 and West Central Maine’s Somerset County431 have 27 and 34 lawyers, respectively, but each county has only four attorneys under the age of 40.432


It is impossible to give enough credit to the herculean efforts of Senator Edmund S. Muskie, Judge Frank M. Coffin, the Honorable Howard H. Dana, Jr., and Chief Justice Daniel E. Wathen, all whom have been mighty members of the access to justice relay team, since the late 1980s. These leaders passed the baton among themselves and to the next generation of Maine lawyer-leaders to ensure that “justice for all” is not a hollow promise. Senator Muskie was not only a state and national political icon, he was an advocate for equality and access to justice for all people. Muskie was the architect of the access to justice movement in Maine. “His work culminated in the [1990] Report of the Maine Commission on Legal Needs, a seminal document that still informs the ongoing effort to provide access to justice for Maine’s poor.”433

In response to LSC funding cuts in the early 1990s, Chief Justice Wathen delivered remarks at the 1995 Forum on the Future of Legal Services and asked: “Do the drastic changes in federal funding for legal services mean that Maine has to ration justice and abandon its goal of providing equal justice for its most vulnerable citizens?”434 Chief Justice Wathen, in partnership with, among others, Federal District Court Judge Frank Coffin and Associate Justice Howard Dana, Jr. created the Justice Action Group (JAG).

The JAG is a judge-led, “non-partisan coalition of the major organizations in Maine concerned with assuring that Maine’s low-income and elderly citizens get equal access to civil justice.”435 The coalition consists of the Maine Judicial Branch, the Maine State Bar Association, the Maine Trial Lawyers Association, the University of Maine School of Law, and Maine’s seven leading legal aid providers.436 The mission of the JAG is to advocate for a system of justice that is fair to all and accommodates low-income and other vulnerable Mainers.

The JAG seeks to address unmet civil legal needs by supporting both provision of civil legal services to individual clients and systemic advocacy on behalf of a large numbers of similarly situated people and groups, all of whom face daunting barriers to civil justice.437 One of the JAG’s major accomplishments was its work with the Maine Legislature in 1997 to pass a bill that created a funding...
stream for the Civil Legal Service Fund and a Commission to oversee allocation of those funds, the state-based funding stream discussed above.\(^{438}\) The Maine Civil Legal Services Fund and its Commission were the realization of Senator Muskie’s dream. Not only does the MCLSF make it possible to employ legal aid attorneys full time, the Fund is an important catalyst for resident, private attorneys to volunteer to provide pro bono services to help address the unmet legal needs of people statewide.

The Board of Overseers of the Maine Bar—created by the Maine Supreme Judicial Court in 1978 to govern the conduct of lawyers as officers of the Court—needed to determine the number of resident, private attorneys that could augment the number of legal aid service providers, in light of anecdotal evidence that Maine’s bar seemed to be aging and that 14 of 16 counties faced a dramatic and uneven distribution of lawyers.\(^{439}\) The Board is responsible for compiling and keeping current for the Court a register of all persons admitted as members of the Bar. In fulfilling that charge, the Board of Overseers annually analyzes attorney demographics including, but not limited to, registration status, age, admission year, gender, practice type, practice size, and geographic location. This core mission prompted the Board to identify and consider a more focused study of the greying of the bar and other access-to-justice issues facing Maine.\(^{440}\) To conduct this study, the Board established the Task Force on Bar Demographics. The Task Force commenced its study in August 2013 and published its report and recommendations in June 2014.

The Task Force was comprised of members of the Board of Overseers, the Maine State Bar Association, the University of Maine School of Law, the Maine Assistance Program for Lawyers, the Judiciary, and the private bar. The Task Force members were diverse in age and gender, as well as from geographical and organizational standpoints. The charge of the Task Force was twofold: (1) to examine the challenges facing the Maine Bar; and (2) to explore how other jurisdictions were responding to these challenges. The Task Force divided into three study teams, one of which was the Rural/New Attorneys Team.

The Rural/New Attorneys Team sought to identify and address, among other things, the shifting bar demographics that leave rural communities underserved. The team developed a ten-question survey instrument designed to elicit data about the factors new lawyers considered when deciding where to practice. Among other questions, the survey asked respondents if they were engaged in a practice defined as “rural.”\(^{441}\)

The survey was distributed to 759 Maine lawyers who had practiced in the state for five years or less, with one goal being to identify what factors they considered when deciding where to practice.\(^{442}\) More than one-third of the lawyers contacted responded to the survey. Only 17% of respondents had chosen a rural location (defined as “a location other than Greater Portland, Saco/Biddeford, Lewiston/Auburn, Augusta or Bangor”), and only about a quarter of those who reported choosing not to practice in rural areas had even seriously considered doing so.\(^{443}\) When respondents were asked what influenced their decision not to pursue rural practice, the most selected reason was “lack of professional opportunities for partner,” with “income too low” a very close second.\(^{444}\)

The survey also sought to identify whether respondents had considered a solo practice, as many small town lawyers are solo practitioners.\(^{445}\) Although two-thirds of respondents had considered solo practice at one time, the vast majority decided against it, citing income instability as the primary

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\(^{439}\) See id.

\(^{440}\) See supra note 423, at 3. The Task Force focused on bar demographics, as opposed to overall demographics.

\(^{441}\) See id. This was defined as a place other than Portland or one of the state’s more populous areas.

\(^{442}\) See id. at 2.

\(^{443}\) Id.

\(^{444}\) Id.

\(^{445}\) See id.; see also Pruitt & Showman, supra note [ ], at 472 (noting that the dominant practice types in rural America are solo practitioners and small firms.).
reason.\textsuperscript{446} It was this survey conducted by the Task Force that led, in part, to the June 2014 Report and Recommendations that provided the data cited above. In an effort to create a path of action to respond to the access-to-justice crisis created by Maine’s inevitable lawyer shortage documented in its 2014 report, the Task Force issued a set of recommendations.\textsuperscript{447}

The Task Force members advised, first and foremost, that a call to action must include a variety of stakeholders.\textsuperscript{448} Next, the Task Force offered eight recommendations: (1) Outreach efforts, such as forming rural attorney-law student mentor-mentee relationships; (2) Internship Programs, such as summer clerkships in rural practices; (3) Education, such as offering sponsored solo/small firm boot camps and solo/small firm practice curriculum at the law school; (4) Internet Resources, such as interactive listservs and informational websites; (5) Proxy Designation Consent\textsuperscript{449}; (6) Regional Senior Attorneys’ Group, promoting mentorship and support; (7) Records and Data Management, providing cloud management software in support of best practice law firm management; and (8) Continued Study, promoting comprehensive and ongoing examination of bar demographics to facilitate the provision of legal services for rural communities and support services to legal providers.\textsuperscript{450}

4. The Role of the Law School: Contributing to Access-to-Justice Policy Efforts

Following on the recommendations of the Task Force on Bar Demographics and the policy efforts of the JAG, the University of Maine School of Law (Maine Law) in the summer of 2016, partnered with the Maine State Bar Association, the Maine Board of Overseers of the Bar, and the Maine Justice Foundation to plan and launch the Maine Law Rural Lawyer Project. In Spring 2017, with seed funding from the Maine Justice Foundation and in-kind contributions from the remaining three partners, Maine Law—the public and only law school in Maine—launched The Rural Lawyer Project with a “Preparing for Rural Practice” Workshop for attorneys and law students.\textsuperscript{451}

The Maine Law Rural Lawyer Project places law students (formally referred to as “Fellows”) with practitioners in communities that would otherwise have limited access to legal services. Maine Law students work in the summers under the guidance of practitioners and are exposed to all facets of rural practice, including, but not limited to, legal research and drafting, dispute resolution, general practice case management, real estate transactions, trial practice, and ethics. Maine Law students are also encouraged by Maine Law faculty and staff, rural mentors, and other liaison attorneys to perform volunteer work for legal aid providers in the area where they are serving as Fellows. The purpose of this additional component of the fellowship is to coordinate the experiences of the Fellow and his or her mentor with supporting area legal aid attorneys to avoid unnecessary overlaps in legal service provision. In this way, the Rural Lawyer Project work is consistent with the cooperative template developed and implemented by the JAG and its seven legal service providers.


\textsuperscript{447} See supra note 423, at 15.

\textsuperscript{448} See id.

\textsuperscript{449} This refers to the recommendation that it be mandatory to designate a proxy on the annual registration form, particularly for solo practitioners. The proxy designation would require written consent as well as mandatory information sharing. See id.

\textsuperscript{450} See id.


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A committee representing the project’s partners deliberately chose Northern Maine’s Aroostook County as the site to launch the Maine Law Rural Lawyer Project Fellowships. They made this decision based on Aroostook County’s engaged and active county bar and that bar’s early commitment to the fellowship concept. “The County,” as it is known, is legendary, an iconic symbol of Maine’s grit, beauty, ruggedness—and rurality. Aroostook County is legendary. Named for a Native American word meaning “Beautiful River,” Aroostook is also referred to as “The Crown of Maine” and “The Last Frontier of the East.” Incorporated in 1839, The County is Maine’s northernmost area, bordered on three sides by Canada. Aroostook County is larger than Connecticut and Rhode Island combined, covering 6,672 square miles (three times the size of an average Californian county). While Aroostook County represents nearly 22% of the state’s land area, it is home to a mere 5.4% of the state’s population (just under 68,000). The County is comprised of two cities, 55 towns, 11 plantations, and 110 unorganized townships.

In the inaugural summer of the Maine Law Rural Lawyer Project, two students were placed as Fellows in the County. In the second summer, these returning Fellows have the option of returning to the same or different counties, and will be joined by first-year Fellows. First-year Fellows receive $6000 each for a minimum of ten weeks of full-time work; second-year Fellows receive $7,500 each for the same commitment.

The rural attorney mentors are competitively selected by a committee representative of the project partners. Rural attorney mentors complete an application, which allows the committee to: (1) determine the type of work that will be assigned to the Fellows, (2) measure the amount of time the mentor will dedicate to meaningful mentoring, and (3) assess a mentor’s purpose for engaging in the project. The rural attorney mentors, as well as each county’s bar association, are asked to identify regional points of contact, all of whom are responsible for linking Fellows to community organizations for the purpose of connecting the Fellows to social networks in each of the counties.

The workshop that launched the Maine Law Rural Lawyer Project, “Preparing for Rural Practice,” brings together attorneys and law students to discuss rural practice challenges and opportunities. This innovative half-day program features panels comprised of law faculty, rural lawyers, and judges discussing the fundamentals of rural practice, the lawyer’s role in rural practice and in the community, and pathways from law school to rural practice.

Two Maine Law students, fresh off their first year of law school, were introduced to workshop participants as the inaugural Fellows. Rising 2Ls Ryan Rutledge and Cameron Goodwin were heading to Aroostook County. Goodwin spent his fellowship experience at Smith and Associates Law Office, and Rutledge was at Bemis & Rossignol LLC, both in the City of Presque Isle, the largest city in Aroostook County. Reflecting on the summer experience, Ryan Rutledge had this to say:

Maine is largely a rural state once you leave the greater Portland area, and the Rural Practice Fellowship is doing a great job of showing law students like myself what life is really like if they want to practice in a smaller law firm in a rural community. In just a ten-week fellowship placement, I learned countless lessons and skills that I will carry with me throughout my legal career, and I can directly link those skills back to the Rural Practice Fellowship at Maine Law.

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455 Internal administrative selection documents on file in the Career Services Office at the University of Maine School of Law.
For summer 2018, Maine Law has funding to support four students in rural practices in communities outside of Cumberland and York counties. Qualifying communities within the remaining 14 counties must have fewer than 10,000 residents. Private attorneys in these communities had the opportunity to apply to be host mentors; the response from the private bar was overwhelmingly positive, and far in excess of the four spots for which there is funding. In the application, host mentor applicants were asked to identify why they have an interest in serving as a mentor; the response was a resounding, “We need attorneys here!”

Maine Law students may apply for placement with selected law practices in Aroostook, Hancock, Knox, Piscataquis, Somerset, Waldo, and Washington counties. Ryan Rutledge will return in 2018 as a Fellow for a second summer, though he will serve at a different firm in a different county.

Maine Law students are also involved with Maine Law’s efforts to promote rural practice. Two days after the workshop that launched the Rural Lawyer Project, several students who attended the workshop asked about ways to get involved with promoting rural practice. Having traded correspondence with the former Dean of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (Bowen) about that law school’s relatively new student organization called The Finch Society, the Maine Law dean’s office encouraged Maine Law students to create their own chapter of The Finch Society. Within two weeks, Maine Law students had done just that.

The purpose of Maine Law’s Finch Society is to connect law students with rural and small-town practitioners and to provide a place for students to learn more about what rural and small town legal practice is like. Given that much of the State of Maine can be defined as rural, providing a space for law students to learn about and connect to practitioners in Maine is vital to ensure that Maine’s legal community continues to serve all of the state, not only metro areas. The Finch Society’s goal is to encourage law students to pursue careers in rural and small-town Maine. Access to legal resources is vital for all Americans and all Mainers. The Finch Society hopes to increase this access by providing information and resources to students so that they feel confident practicing the law in rural, regional, and small-town Maine.

The Maine Law Finch Society planned several activities during the summer of 2017 in support of the Rural Lawyer Project and the two inaugural Fellows serving Aroostook County, but their activism had only just begun. Finch Society members drafted a bill that would give tax credits to lawyers practicing in undeserved parts of Maine. Specifically, Maine Law students drafted LD 1680 — “An Act to Create an Access to Justice Income Tax Credit.” These students are determined to encourage more lawyers to practice in rural areas. LD 1680 received the green light from the Legislative Council in October 2017 after being introduced as an emergency measure.

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456 Internal administrative selection documents on file in the Career Services Office at the University of Maine School of Law.
457 In 2015, University of Arkansas, Little Rock, William H. Bowen School of Law student James Weeks founded The Finch Society. Named after Atticus Finch, the small-town lawyer in Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird, “the society’s mission is to expand legal representation in modest communities through recruitment, mentorship, and patronage. The goal is to provide access to justice across the country at large until legal counsel is within close reach of all who are touched by the law.” See Law society at Bowen focuses on expanding rural justice, U. ARK. WILLIAM H. BOWEN SCH. OF LAW (June 10, 2016), http://ulrl.edu/law/2016/06/10/law-society-at-bowen-focuses-on-expanding-rural-justice/ [https://perma.cc/7NKF-3FZF].
460 See id. See also Renee Cordes, Tax-credit bill for rural lawyers set for public hearing in Augusta, MAINEBIZ (Jan. 15, 2018), http://www.mainebiz.biz/article/20180115/NEWS01/180119966/1088 [https://perma.cc/SD9F-94CZ].
On January 22, 2018, the Maine Legislature’s Taxation Committee held a public hearing on LD 1680. The bill is sponsored by Representative Donna Bailey (D-Saco) and co-sponsored by Senator Lisa Keim (R-Oxford), and it is modeled on programs available for dentists and doctors to locate in rural Maine.

The Maine State Bar Association testified in support of LD 1680. Other supporters included several Maine Law staff and students, the Maine Bar Foundation, Legal Services for the Elderly, the Judicial Branch, and the Maine Justice Foundation. No one opposed the bill. On February 8, 2018, the Taxation Committee held a working session and unanimously approved an amended bill that would create a five-year program offering a $6000 annual tax credit for up to five lawyers per year in rural Maine according to criteria set by the Maine Supreme Judicial Court. As of this writing, the bill is awaiting consideration by the full legislature.

5. Conclusion

The issue of rural lawyer shortages is not unique to Maine, as this comparison among six states illustrates. LD 1680 gives Maine an opportunity to jump start a rural access-to-justice movement, both figuratively and literally. Such a movement would be in line with Senator Ed Muskie’s long-standing efforts to recognize access to justice challenges in Maine and to provide a resource stream to respond to the unmet civil legal services needs of Mainers, including those living in the state’s rural reaches.

With reasonable financial incentives—from loan repayment assistance to income tax credits—Maine has an opportunity to attract prospective law students to the state who could quickly become part of a network of leaders in rural communities. Mainers living in rural communities deserve access to justice that is local and responsive to their needs, and Maine Law students and graduates are eager to be part of the solution.

E. South Dakota

South Dakota is unique in having a funded lawyer recruitment program to bring attorneys to rural areas. In 2011 South Dakota’s state bar developed Project Rural Practice, an umbrella project aimed at recruiting rural attorneys. A critical part of Project Rural Practice is the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program, run by South Dakota’s Unified Judicial System (UJS). A first-in-the-nation approach to the issue of recruiting lawyers to rural areas, the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program relies on contributions from the state bar, the legislature, and local communities to provide five years

462 HR. 128-1680, supra note 457; see also Hannah Alsgaard, Rural Incentive Programs for Legal and Medical Professionals: A Comparative Analysis, 59 S. D. L. REV. 585 (2014) (discussing the history of medical rural incentive programs and how those programs can inform legal rural incentive programs).
of funding to qualifying attorneys who move to eligible rural areas.\textsuperscript{468} Nearly five years into the program, the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program has been a success, funding support remains strong, and no attorney has left because of a lack of available work.

This study begins by providing some basic information on lawyer access in South Dakota. The majority of this study serves as an update on the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program and Project Rural Practice in general.\textsuperscript{469} Finally, the study concludes with a discussion of the future recruitment of rural attorneys, including the role of South Dakota’s only law school, the University of South Dakota School of Law (USD Law).

1. \textit{Institutional Framework and South Dakota’s Legal Needs}

As of 2016, South Dakota had a total population of 865,454,\textsuperscript{470} and as of 2018, 1,995 lawyers were practicing as active Bar members.\textsuperscript{471} According to the U.S. Census Bureau definition of “rural,” nearly 52\% of South Dakota’s population is rural.\textsuperscript{472} South Dakota’s residents, as well as its lawyers, are concentrated in its largest cities and the state capital.\textsuperscript{473} Rural South Dakota is majority White, but it also features a significant Native American population.\textsuperscript{474} Statewide, the Native American population is 9\%, but much of that population is concentrated on the state’s nine reservations, all of which are located in rural areas.\textsuperscript{475} South Dakota’s reservations face a particularly stark lawyer shortage. Despite a general shortage of rural attorneys, all but one county in the state has a resident attorney.\textsuperscript{476} The only county without a lawyer is Corson County, part of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in north-central South Dakota.\textsuperscript{477}

South Dakota has responded to the lawyer shortage and allocation problem with the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program, which helps counties with populations of 10,000 or less attract a private-practice attorney.\textsuperscript{478} Because this state profile focuses on the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program, counties are categorized throughout as “qualifying” or “non-qualifying” based on the population line of 10,000 residents.

Before addressing Project Rural Practice and the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program, a short note on legal aid in South Dakota is in order. For 2018, South Dakota is estimated to receive a total of $1,745,095 in LSC funding between its two qualifying legal aid providers Dakota Plains Legal


\textsuperscript{469} In 2014, the South Dakota Law Review published a symposium issue that memorializes much of Project Rural Practice’s history and early success. See David Gilbertson, \textit{Reflections on the Rural Practice of Law in South Dakota: Past, Present, and Future}, 59 S. D. L. REV. 433 (2014); see also Goetzinger & Morris, supra note 475; Pruitt & Showman, supra note 18; Alsgaard, supra note 476, at 585.


\textsuperscript{471} E-mail from Nicole Ogan, Commc’n/Membership Dir., State Bar of S.D. to Hannah Haksgaard, Assistant Professor of Law, Univ. of S.D. Sch. of Law (March 19, 2018, 11:09 CDT) (on file with Hannah Haksgaard).

\textsuperscript{472} Table 1.

\textsuperscript{473} Gilbertson, supra note 476, at 433 (“[South Dakota’s] lawyers are not spread evenly within the state's population. Sixty-five percent of South Dakota attorneys reside in just four counties: Minnehaha, Pennington, Brown, and Hughes. Even at that, the remaining thirty-five percent of lawyers are heavily concentrated in Mitchell, Brookings, Watertown, Yankton, Huron, and the Northern Black Hills. Yet fifty-four percent of South Dakotans live and work in rural areas.”).

\textsuperscript{474} \textit{Quick Facts South Dakota}, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/SD [https://perma.cc/FX5X-3PA3].

\textsuperscript{475} Id.

\textsuperscript{476} Id.


\textsuperscript{478} S.D. CODED LAWS § 16-23-2.1 (West, Westlaw through laws of the 2018 Regular Session effective March 23, 2018, and Supreme Court Rule 17-12) (“A county is eligible to participate in the recruitment assistance program if the county: (1) Has a population of ten thousand persons or less[,]”).

\textsuperscript{479} A full map of qualifying and non-qualifying counties can be found at \textit{Rural Attorney Recruitment Program Map}, S.D. UNIFIED JUDICIAL SYS., http://ujs.sd.gov/Information/rarpmap.aspx [https://perma.cc/6A8Y-4PN8].
Services, Inc. (Dakota Plains) and East River Legal Services (East River).\footnote{LEGAL SERV. CORP., supra note 241, at 8.} Dakota Plains has a strong presence on every reservation in the state.\footnote{See generally DAKOTA PLAINS LEGAL SERV., https://www.dpls.org/ [https://perma.cc/Q4XC-W76B].} For 2018, Dakota Plains is receiving $397,877 for basic field work and $953,608 for services provided to Native Americans.\footnote{LEGAL SERV. CORP., supra note 241, at 8.} Nearly every county served by Dakota Plains is a qualifying county under the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program.\footnote{Areas Served, DAKOTA PLAINS LEGAL SERV., https://www.dpls.org/areas-served [https://perma.cc/UQ7Q-ZZGT]. Dakota Plains has branch offices in Mission (located in Todd County, qualifying); Ft. Thompson (located in Buffalo County, qualifying), Ft. Yates (located in North Dakota), Eagle Butte (located in Dewey and Ziebach Counties, both qualifying, with Dewey participating), Pine Ridge (located in Oglala Lakota County, non-qualifying), Sisseton (located in Roberts County, non-qualifying), and Rapid City (located in Pennington County, non-qualifying).} For 2018, East River is receiving $393,610 in LSC funding.\footnote{LEGAL SERV. CORP., supra note 241, at 8.} East River provides services to residents of thirty-three eastern South Dakota counties.\footnote{East River Legal Serv., http://erlservices.org/ [https://perma.cc/DPQ8-RL7D] (listing the counties served).} The main office is in Sioux Falls, South Dakota’s largest city.\footnote{Id.} Of the thirty-three counties whose residents are served by East River, twenty-two counties qualify for the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program.\footnote{LEGAL SERV. CORP., supra note 241, at 8.} East River and Dakota Plains, like most legal aid providers, struggle with sufficient funds to provide needed services. South Dakota’s legal aid providers are heavily reliant on federal funding because there is no direct state funding. Overall, funding from various sources has varied over the last six years for both Dakota Plains and East River.\footnote{East River Legal Serv., http://erlservices.org/ [https://perma.cc/DPQ8-RL7D].} The net result has held the total funding steady for Dakota Plains since 2014,\footnote{Legal Services Corp. Office of Data Governance & Analysis, Grant Activity Reports 2008-2016, http://public.tableau.com/views/Grantee_Data_Page_Funding/GranteeFunding (follow drop down “State” menu for “SD”, then choose organization name) Dakota Plains Legal Services’ 2016 Internal Revenue Serv. Form 990 Schedule A, page 2 (on file with the Harvard Law Library).} while East River has seen a decline.\footnote{East River Legal Serv., supra note 46; Telephone Interview by Hannah Haksgaard with Annemarie Michaels, Managing Attorney, Dakota Plains Legal Serv. (Nov. 14, 2017) [hereinafter Michaels Interview].}

Neither Dakota Plains nor East River has the ability to provide full legal services to rural communities. LSC grantees can serve only clients who have a household income within 125% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines; are limited in the type of cases they can accept, including the exclusion of any fee-generating cases; can only represent one side on any particular case; and do not contract directly with government entities.\footnote{See what is Legal Aid?, supra note 46; Telephone Interview by Hannah Haksgaard with Annemarie Michaels, Managing Attorney, Dakota Plains Legal Serv. (Nov. 14, 2017) [hereinafter Michaels Interview].} For these, and many other reasons, any suggestion that legal aid providers can provide sufficient access to justice in a rural community is wrong. Private-practice attorneys are needed. For example, Dakota Plains has offices in many small reservation towns, but a private-practice attorney in the same community as Dakota Plains could take criminal appointments, represent clients when Dakota Plains has a conflict or when Dakota Plains is serving as opposing counsel, and serve clients whose incomes fall above the maximum income to qualify for Dakota Plains’ services. Private-practice attorneys can also handle every type of case, including those from which Dakota Plains and East River are precluded by institutional limitations. To help meet this need,
South Dakota developed a first-in-the-nation approach to attracting private-practice attorneys to rural areas.

2. Policy Efforts to Confront Justice Challenges: Project Rural Practice

Although there had long been awareness of the growing rural lawyer shortage in South Dakota, broadcast in part through the advocacy of Chief Justice Gilbertson of the South Dakota Supreme Court, work in earnest on a solution did not begin until 2011. Over the next several years, the South Dakota state bar, judiciary, and legislature worked to develop the idea of Project Rural Practice. In 2013, the South Dakota legislature passed HB 1096, the basic funding bill for the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program part of Project Rural Practice. HB 1096 allocated state funds to make incentive payments to qualifying lawyers who move to and work in rural counties. Lawyers can qualify for the incentive payments by opening a solo practice or joining an existing firm.

The Rural Attorney Recruitment Program provides each participant five years of incentive payments totaling about $13,288 per year. The legislature arrived at this funding amount hoping it would allow participants to make student loan payments and cover basic operating expenses. Although the legislature looked to tuition at USD Law to set a reasonable incentive payment amount, the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program is not tied to USD Law nor is it a tuition reimbursement program, so a lawyer without student loans or a lawyer from a different law school, for example, receives the same incentive payment. The funding comes from three sources: 50% from the state, 15% from the state bar, and 35% from the county where the lawyer is placed. HB 1096 was the establishing legislation, but it was limited in two important ways: first, the bill was written as a pilot program and provided funding for only sixteen lawyers; and second, the bill limited funding to counties with populations fewer than 10,000, which includes 48 of the state’s 66 counties. Although the majority of the state’s counties are eligible for the program, small municipalities in populated counties were not eligible under the original program.

Despite these limitations, the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program quickly attracted young lawyers. Early on, the program faced skepticism from county governments that, tight on funds in general, were being asked to help pay for the presence of a private-practice lawyer. Rural counties and municipalities in South Dakota generally do not have full-time state’s attorneys, city attorneys, or public defenders. Instead, they contract with private-practice attorneys to provide part-time

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492 Gilbertson, supra note 476, at 438–39 (discussing his early efforts to bring attention to the rural lawyer deficiency); Goetzinger & Morris, supra note 475, at 446–48 (discussing the origins of Project Rural Practice).
494 S.D. CODIFIED LAWS § 16-23-5 (West, Westlaw through laws of the 2018 Reg. Sess. effective March 23, 2018, and Supreme Court Rule 17-12). This dollar amount was set “in an amount equal to ninety percent” of USD Law’s in-state tuition as it was in 2013. Id. The reimbursement amount is tied directly to the 2013 tuition, not current tuition. Accordingly, even though USD Law’s tuition has increased since 2013, the incentive payment has remained the same. See Tuition and Fees, UNIV. S.D. SCH. OF L., http://www.usd.edu/law/tuition-and-fees [https://perma.cc/TD5T-RGCI].
495 S.D. CODIFIED LAWS § 16-23-5 (West, Westlaw through laws of the 2018 Reg. Sess. effective March 23, 2018, and Supreme Court Rule 17-12) (“Any attorney who fulfills the requirements of the recruitment assistance program established pursuant to this chapter, is entitled to receive an incentive payment in five equal annual installments, each in an amount equal to ninety percent of the University of South Dakota School of Law resident tuition and fees as determined on July 1, 2013.”).
497 For just one example of a county’s hesitation to provide funding, see Elizabeth Grosz, Douglas County First in State to Participate in Rural Attorney Recruitment Program, YANKTON DAILY PRESS & DAKOTAN (Nov. 13, 2013), http://www.yankton.net/community/article_be932114-4ce4-11e3-8b7c-001a4e887a.html [https://perma.cc/75V7-4ED5]. See also Alsgaard, supra note 476, at 611–12.
498 Because part-time state’s attorneys are so prevalent, South Dakota law provides for differences between full-time and part-time state’s attorneys. Compare S.D. CODIFIED LAWS § 7-16-19 (West, Westlaw through laws of the 2018 Reg. Sess. effective March 23, 2018, and Supreme Court Rule 17-12) with S.D. CODIFIED LAWS § 7-16-19.1 (West, Westlaw through
services. When there are no local attorneys, counties and municipalities must pay for attorneys to travel from other counties to serve as prosecutors and defense counsel, which greatly increases legal costs for the county. 499 Gregory County serves as an example.

Gregory County, a qualifying county in south-central South Dakota, has seven attorneys. Three of those attorneys work together in a single office, and one of those attorneys is the part-time State’s Attorney for Gregory County. 500 All three lawyers in the firm are thus conflicted out of criminal defense court appointments, abuse and neglect proceedings, and involuntary commitments. 501 Another attorney in the county works in-house for a bank, making her generally unavailable for any court appointments. 502 Two more attorneys are near retirement age and have refused all court appointments for the last several years, instead opting to focus on estate planning, real estate, and taxes. 503 One of those attorneys plans to retire in the next year. 504 While providing needed services, these two attorneys do not handle any family law, criminal law, or personal injury cases. 505 The final attorney in the county can take criminal appointments, but she was the State’s Attorney for years, meaning she frequently has conflicts in criminal matters. 506 This leaves Gregory County importing attorneys for court appointments. 507 And of course, even if there were legal aid attorneys available, they could not fulfill the need because they cannot contract with the government. 508

Thus Gregory County, despite its seven lawyers, has an access to justice issue. However, Gregory County will soon be participating in the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program. Rachelle Norberg, who

laws of the 2018 Reg. Sess. effective March 23, 2018, and Supreme Court Rule 17-12). For counties that cannot even come up with a resident state’s attorney, state law allows non-residents to serve as the state’s attorney so long as (1) the county has a population under 5,000 and (2) the state’s attorney lives in a contiguous county. S.D. CODIFIED LAWS § 7-16-31 (West, Westlaw through laws of the 2018 Reg. Sess. effective March 23, 2018, and Supreme Court Rule 17-12). Some state’s attorneys service more than one county. See SD State’s Attorneys, S.D. ST.’S ATT’YS ASS’N, http://sdstatesattorneys.org/sd-states-attorneys/ [https://perma.cc/7XHQ-MT9S] (indicating that James Sword serves as the state’s attorney for the contiguous counties of Fall River and Oglala Lakota and that Alvin Pahlike serves as the state’s attorney for the contiguous counties of Todd and Tripp).

499 See Ethan Bronner, No Lawyer for Miles, So One Rural State Offers Pay, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 8, 2013), http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/09/us/subsidy-seen-as-a-way-to-fill-a-need-for-rural-lawyers.html [http://perma.cc/4M6L-UADA] (noting that during the weekly court session in Bennett County, South Dakota, the local lunch place included “a table of lawyers, the ones in suits, ties and no hats. All had driven more than two hours from Rapid City and Pierre, paid by Bennett County, which also pays to transport prisoners 100 miles away because it has no functioning jail.”). In South Dakota, state’s attorneys are governed by South Dakota Codified Laws Chapter 7-16, which generally contemplates that a county’s state’s attorney will reside in that county. See S.D. CODIFIED LAWS § 7-16-31 (West, Westlaw through laws of the 2018 Reg. Sess. and Supreme Court Rule 17-12) (implying a presumption of a residency requirement by noting that “[i]n any county with a population of less than five thousand persons, no state's attorney is disqualified from holding office for failure to be a resident of that county if the state's attorney is a resident of a county which is contiguous to the county in which the state's attorney holds such office.”).


501 See Attorneys, supra note 495 (looking at each attorney’s biography provided on the webpage indicates their background and professional conflicts).

502 Interview by Hannah Haksgaard with Kelsea Kenzy Sutton, Compliance Officer, First Fidelity Bank, in Vermillion, S.D. (Mar. 21, 2018) [hereinafter Sutton Interview].

503 Id.

504 Interview by Hannah Haksgaard with Rachelle Norberg, in Vermillion, S.D. (Mar. 20, 2018) [Norberg Interview].

505 Sutton Interview, supra note 509.

506 Id.

507 Gregory County frequently imports attorneys from Charles Mix County, Tripp County, Davison County, Lyman County, and even as far away as Hughes County (home of the state capital). Id. The county has twice had to reach further for qualified non-conflicted attorneys: in two recent murder trials the County contracted with lawyers out of Rapid City and Sioux Falls. Id.

508 Michaels Interview, supra note 509.
graduated from USD Law Spring 2018 and is from Gregory County, will be returning to practice law as a participant in the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program.509 Because criminal appointments are an issue for Gregory County, the County agreed to fund Norberg on the condition that she takes criminal appointments.510 Norberg will be taking over a solo practice in the municipality of Burke where she will continue the real estate and title work done by the current lawyer, who will soon be retiring, but she will also begin taking criminal appointments and at least one pro bono case per year.511 Norberg will also be serving as a city attorney for four municipalities, three in Gregory County and one in contiguous Charles Mix County.512 Gregory County perfectly illustrates that having private-practice attorneys in a county saves the county money on travel costs. Despite some initial resistance to participating in the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program, counties have realized that contributing 35% of the incentive payment and effectively eliminating travel costs not only makes financial sense for the government but also provides benefits to the local population by providing easier access to a private-practice attorney.513 If an additional lawyer in Gregory County—which already has seven lawyers—makes such a large difference, just imagine the impact a new lawyer can have in a county with one or no lawyers.

Despite initial skepticism, as of fall 2017, all but one county approached by the UJS to participate in the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program has signed a contract.514 In several situations, the counties’ financial contributions towards the program are being covered in whole or part by a private donor or a municipality located in the county.515 After HB 1096 was passed in 2013, the UJS initially approached counties about participating in the program without having particular participants in mind. Since then, negotiations between UJS and the counties have typically occurred after a prospective participant has been identified. Three counties approached the UJS about finding an attorney by submitting a notice of intent to participate in the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program; two of those counties have secured a participant.516 The Rural Attorney Recruitment Program was able to fill the original sixteen slots for attorneys and has since secured state funding for another sixteen participants.

As of fall 2017, fifteen lawyers are currently participating in the program, and four more participants have signed contracts and will begin practicing after passing the bar in 2018.517 Several

509 Norberg Interview, supra note 511.
510 Id.
511 Id.; Sutton Interview, supra note 509.
512 Norberg Interview, supra note 511.
513 See, e.g., ISBA Rural Practice Committee Seeks Attorneys Willing To Hire Summer Clerks, Full-Time Associates In 2016, IOWA LAWYER WKL. (Oct. 7, 2015), http://www.iowabar.org/page/IAWeekly100715/.htm [https://perma.cc/MSZP-BHGU] (“[Nebraska and South Dakota] have some rural counties with no attorneys. This has created a difficult situation when courts need to appoint attorneys to defend individuals charged in a criminal matter, or when towns need a city attorney. It has also created a significant cost when courts or towns have to bring in attorneys from miles away.”).
514 Grant County, in the northeast corner of the state, initially turned down a Project Rural Practice placement, but after a private-practice attorney agreed to pay the county’s entire share, Grant County signed a contract and a Project Rural Practice lawyer is now practicing alongside the donor attorney. Jackson Schwandt Joins Coester Law Office, VALLEY EXPRESS (May 9, 2016), http://thevalleyexpress.com/2016/05/09/jackson-schwandt-joins-coester-law-office/ [https://perma.cc/9FNS-NT3W]. Bill Coester, the donor attorney, approached Project Rural Practice about taking on a participant as an associate so he could begin to transition into retirement. E-mail from Bill Coester to Hannah Haksgaard, Attorney at Law (Nov. 20, 2017, 16:23 CST) (on file with Hannah Haksgaard). Custer County, on the western edge of the state, also turned down a Project Rural Practice placement very early during the program. Custer County has not been approached again with a specific attorney wanting to return home to practice. Telephone Interview with Suzanne Star, Director of the Division of Policy and Legal Services of the South Dakota Unified Judicial System (Dec. 1, 2017) [hereinafter Star Interview].
515 See, e.g., Jackson Schwandt Joins Coester Law Office, supra note 521.
516 Mellette County (spot filled), Ziebach County (spot not filled), and Bennett County (spot to be filled in 2018) are the three counties that contacted the UJS about finding an attorney. Star Interview, supra note 521. Participants are currently practicing in: Grant County; Marshall County; Spink County; Hand County; Jerauld County; Miner County; McCook County; Douglas County; Tripp County (two lawyers); McPherson County; Haakon County; Lyman County; Perkins County; and Harding County. New participants will be added in: Bennett County; Mellette County; Dewey County; and Gregory County in 2018. Rural Attorney Recruitment Program Map, SOUTH DAKOTA UNIFIED JUDICIAL SYSTEM, http://uijs.sd.gov/Information/rarpmap.aspx [https://perma.cc/JEF8-YV8R].
others are negotiating their participation, but contracts are not yet signed.\textsuperscript{518} The program’s current participants are geographically well-spaced around the state (as illustrated by a map on the State Bar website),\textsuperscript{519} but even considering the four participants set to begin practice in 2018, twenty-nine eligible counties still will not have a Rural Attorney Recruitment Program participant.\textsuperscript{520} The UJS does not attempt to persuade potential participants to move to the most remote counties or the counties with the fewest lawyers, as it recognizes that long-term fit is the most important objective when placing an attorney.\textsuperscript{521}

Of the fifteen current participants, eleven graduated from USD Law; two graduated from law school out-of-state but are originally from South Dakota; and two had no prior ties to South Dakota.\textsuperscript{522} All four lawyers who will begin the program in 2018 attended USD Law.\textsuperscript{523} Thus, only four of the current participants did not graduate from USD Law.\textsuperscript{524} Two of those attorneys, Zach Pahlke and Jake Fischer, returned home to practice law.\textsuperscript{525} Zach Pahlke grew up in Winner, a small town in Tripp County in south-central South Dakota, and received his bachelors and J.D. degrees from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln.\textsuperscript{526} After law school, Pahlke began practicing at his parents’ law firm in Winner as a Rural Attorney Recruitment Program participant.\textsuperscript{527} He also serves as the part-time state’s attorney for contiguous Mellette County and the part-time deputy state’s attorney for contiguous Tripp and Todd Counties.\textsuperscript{528}

Jake Fischer grew up on a farm outside of Parkston, a small town in Hutchinson County in southeastern South Dakota. He is a graduate of the law school at the University of Minnesota.\textsuperscript{529} After a clerkship and some work at a rural-focused non-profit, Fischer began participating in the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program and joined an existing law firm, opening a new office for the firm in Corsica, a small town in Douglas County, which is a county contiguous with Fischer’s home county.\textsuperscript{530}

Notably, two participants with no previous ties to the state have moved to South Dakota. Kristen Kochekian is from North Carolina and received her J.D. from the Oklahoma City University School of Law.\textsuperscript{531} Jennifer English is originally from a small town in Indiana and received her J.D. from Ohio Northern University.\textsuperscript{532} Both Kochekian and English were looking for traditional public interest jobs when they learned about the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program through national media coverage and subsequently applied.\textsuperscript{533} Both Kochekian and English report that they are happy with the program, the mentorship they have received, their legal practices, and their decisions to relocate to

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{518} Star Interview, supra note 521.  
\textsuperscript{520} See id.  
\textsuperscript{521} Star Interview, supra note 521.  
\textsuperscript{522} Id.  
\textsuperscript{523} Id.  
\textsuperscript{524} Id.  
\textsuperscript{525} This is not surprising, as we would expect more rural students to be willing to return to rural areas to practice. See Lisa R. Pruitt et. al., supra note 26, at 631-32 (noting that law student interest in practicing in a rural area was generally higher for students from rural areas).  
\textsuperscript{526} E-mail from Zach Pahlke to Hannah Haksgaard (Dec. 1, 2017, 12:27 CST) (on file with Hannah Haksgaard) [hereinafter E-mail from Pahlke]; see also Dan Merritt, Pahlke Becomes Hometown Attorney, WINNER ADVOCATE, March 11, 2015, http://thewinneradvocate.com/pahlke-becomes-hometown-attorney/ [https://perma.cc/YG4T-UM22].  
\textsuperscript{527} E-mail from Pahlke, supra note 533.  
\textsuperscript{528} See id.; see also Jeri Thomas, Zach Pahlke Appointed as Mellette County State’s Attorney, DAKOTA RADIO GROUP (Apr. 2, 2015), http://www.drgnews.com/zach-pahlke-appointed-mellette-county-states-attorney/ [https://perma.cc/7NPK-7AWX].  
\textsuperscript{529} See E-mail from Jake Fischer to Hannah Haksgaard (Dec. 8, 2017, 11:56 CST) (on file with Hannah Haksgaard).  
\textsuperscript{530} See id.  
\textsuperscript{531} Telephone Interview with Kristen Kochekian (Nov. 27, 2017) [hereinafter Kochekian Interview].  
\textsuperscript{532} Telephone Interview with Jennifer English (Nov. 29, 2017) [hereinafter English Interview].  
\textsuperscript{533} See Kochekian Interview, supra note 538; English Interview, supra note 538.
South Dakota. 534 Both consider their work to be a form of public interest lawyering, particularly because they provide legal services to multiple generations of single families. 535

Kochekian and English are unique in being new to South Dakota, but they are typical in terms of their success in the program. No participants have left the program due to a shortage of work. 536 In fact, at least one participant has so much business that he has taken on associates. 537 This preliminary success is certainly due in part to support for Project Rural Practice by numerous entities in South Dakota. In addition to the administrative services provided by the UJS, the state bar and its membership play a crucial role in supporting the program. The state bar provides support and funding to the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program. For example, Project Rural Practice conducted a successful fundraising campaign several years ago to fund the state bar’s funding commitment. The fundraising effort, called the Cozad Challenge, raised over $190,000 from state bar members with a matching portion from Fred and Luella Cozad. 538 Fred Cozad was a rural attorney from Bennett County and one of the inspirations for Project Rural Practice. 539

Beyond providing financial resources, the state bar membership has been active and invested in the program. Rural attorneys, especially those beginning to contemplate retirement, have welcomed participants into their law practices and served as mentors. 540 Of the fifteen current participants, five started solo practices while ten joined existing firms. Although most participants have built-in mentors because they are joining existing firms, those opening solo practices are matched with mentoring attorneys. 541 The mentors are assigned based not on location, but rather on compatibility. 542 The UJS attempts to connect each participant with the local clerks of court, who are valuable resources based on their knowledge of local procedural processes. 543 Participants starting solo practices are also well-supported by the communities they enter—two counties have provided free office space in county courthouses for participants opening solo practices, and another county has committed to doing the same for a participant who passed the February 2018 bar and will soon begin practicing. 544

The state legislature has also continued to support Project Rural Practice. In addition to providing funding, the legislature has permitted needed changes to the program. HB 1053, passed in 2017, allows small municipalities in populated counties, which were formerly excluded, to participate in the

534 Kochekian Interview, supra note 538.
535 Id.
536 Interview by Hannah Haksgaard with David Gilbertson, Chief Justice, S.D. Supreme Court, in Vermillion, S.D. (Oct. 5, 2017) [hereinafter Gilbertson Interview]. The program did lose two attorneys, a husband and wife, when one received a dream job offer to teach at South Dakota State University. Brittany and Ryan McKnight were both Rural Attorney Recruitment Program participants for a short time period in Philip, South Dakota, before relocating to Brookings, South Dakota. Del Bartels, Kjerstad McKnight Law Office Is Open for Business, PIONEER REV. (Sept. 30, 2015), http://pioneer-review.com/pioneer-review/kjerstad-mcknight-law-office-open-business [https://perma.cc/KFD7-4NVW].
537 Clay Anderson is an attorney located in Miller, a town in Hand County, who practices at his own law firm. Our Team, DAKOTA LAW FIRM, PROF. L.L.C., http://www.dakotalawfirm.com/our-team/ [https://perma.cc/SM8Q-TEVA]. A native of Miller, Anderson returned to his hometown after graduating from USD Law as a Rural Attorney Recruitment Program participant and began as an associate with an established firm. Clay then opened his own law firm and has already hired two associates, one of whom then left to start his own law firm. Clay is based in Miller, but takes cases from all over the state and credits his willingness to travel, his life prior to law school—including being an Iraq veteran—his work ethic, and his values and integrity as critical to his success in rural legal practice. E-mail from Clay Anderson to Hannah Haksgaard (Nov. 16, 2017, 10:09 CST) (on file with Hannah Haksgaard).
538 E-mail from Patrick Goetzinger to Hannah Haksgaard (Dec. 2, 2017, 8:28 CST) (on file with Hannah Haksgaard).
539 Id.; Bronner, supra 517 (profiling Fred Cozad). Fred Cozad died in August 2017.
540 For one example, see Bill Coester’s explanation for his participation in Project Rural Practice. E-mail from Coester, supra note 532.
541 Id.
542 Id.
543 Id.
544 Gilbertson Interview, supra note 543. The two counties providing courthouse space are Perkins County and Hawkin County. Star Interview, supra note __. Bennett County will be providing the same for Amanda LaCroix. Id.
Rural Attorney Recruitment Program. One example of why this change was needed is Wall, South Dakota. Rapid City—South Dakota’s second-largest city, with 390 registered lawyers and a population of 67,956—is in western Pennington County, a county that spans more than a hundred miles from east to west. Wall—with no registered lawyers and a population of 766—is in eastern Pennington County. Under the original legislation, Wall was ineligible to participate because Pennington County has over 10,000 residents. HB 1053 amended the law to allow individual municipalities with populations under 3,500, like Wall, to participate in the program, even when they are within high-population counties. The South Dakota legislature passed HB 1053 in 2017, but as of this publication no attorneys have been placed under the new municipality provisions. A potential participant has been identified for Wall, however, and the city of Wall is interested in funding that lawyer.

Although the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program is open to placing an attorney in Indian Country, none of the fifteen participants has been placed on a reservation. Lawyers have been placed, however, in counties that include reservation lands and in non-reservation towns with substantial Native American populations. Two barriers to placement in Indian Country are worth mentioning. The first is that South Dakota law requires the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program contract to be signed with a county commission or a municipality and does not contemplate direct negotiation with tribal government. The multiple levels of government operating in Indian Country thus complicate the process.

The second barrier to participant placement in Indian Country is that Dakota Plains, the LSC-funded provider with a presence on South Dakota’s Indian Reservations, has a strong presence on every reservation. This creates a perception that private-practice attorneys are not critical to the communities and, therefore, not worth funding. While legal aid attorneys are available for some basic needs on South Dakota’s reservations, there is still a vital role to be played by private-practice attorneys in Indian Country. In fact, because of its funding sources, Dakota Plains faces limitations on who it can serve, both in terms of the amount of resources it receives and how those resources may be used.

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545 See S.D. CODIFIED LAWS § 16-23-1 (West, Westlaw through laws of the 2018 Reg. Sess. effective March 21, 2018, and Supreme Court Rule 17-12) (allowing “rural counties and municipalities” to participate in the program).
548 Star Interview, supra note 521.
549 Gilbertson Interview, supra note 543.
550 For example, Amy Janssen is practicing in Kennebec, a small town in Lyman County. Lyman County is also home to the Lower Brule Indian Reservation, but Kennebec is not within the outer bounds of the reservation. Lucy Halverson, Kennebec Has a New Attorney, LYMAN COUNTY HERALD, June 21, 2017, http://www.lcherald.com/news.php?extend.2220.10. Amanda LaCroix, who has signed a contract and passed the February 2018 bar, will be practicing in Martin, a town in Bennett County. Bennett County includes reservation land, but Martin itself is not part of a reservation. Martin is approximately 42% Caucasian and 48% Native American and is located between the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations. Bennett County Commissioners Proceedings 3-18-15, BENNETT COUNTY BOOSTER II, April 1, 2015, http://bennettcountyboostersd.com/legals/1712-bennett-county-commissioners-proceedings-3-18-15. Martin was also home to Fred Cozad, a long-time attorney who played an important role in establishing Project Rural Practice. See Bronner, supra note 517.
551 See S.D. Codified Laws § 16-23-7 (allowing “[a]ny rural county or municipality” to contract and appropriate funds for the Rural Attorney Assistance Program, but not contemplating tribal governments to do the same).
553 Michaels Interview, supra note 509.
554 Id.
555 Id.
3. Role of Legal Education

There is one law school in South Dakota, the University of South Dakota School of Law, which is located in Vermillion, a town in the southeast corner of the state with a population of 10,844.\textsuperscript{556} For the 2017–2018 academic year, the full-time academic-year tuition and fee rates at USD Law are $15,668.40 for South Dakota residents and $33,744.40 for non-residents.\textsuperscript{557} USD Law consistently ranks high on the Best Value Law Schools list.\textsuperscript{558} USD Law averages fifty to seventy-five students per graduating class.\textsuperscript{559} In recent years, USD Law has matriculated about 65 percent South Dakota residents and has placed about 60 percent of its graduating classes into jobs in South Dakota.\textsuperscript{560}

USD Law has supported Project Rural Practice from the beginning. In addition to funneling students into the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program, USD Law encourages its students to pursue rural legal practice in other ways. Every year during 1L orientation week, Chief Justice Gilbertson speaks to the incoming students and promotes rural practice.\textsuperscript{561} Notably, a new program was started by Project Rural Practice in the summer of 2017 to place first- and second-year law students in summer jobs at rural law firms.\textsuperscript{562} Using a $25,000 grant to partially fund summer internships in rural counties, the career office at USD Law works to connect law students and small-town practitioners with the goal of exposing students to rural practice and connecting them with the rural legal community.\textsuperscript{563} The intern must be paid, but in an attempt to get more rural practitioners involved, the Project Rural Practice grant will reimburse the practitioner for up to half of the wages paid.\textsuperscript{564} During summer 2017, which was the program’s first year, four law students participated.\textsuperscript{565} Two of those students have now committed to entering the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program, buoyed by their summers in rural placements.\textsuperscript{566} The program will operate again in summer 2018.\textsuperscript{567}

Other states, including the neighboring states of Nebraska and North Dakota, have focused their efforts on exposing law students to rural legal practice through educational tours or summer internships.\textsuperscript{568} Neither state, however, has yet developed the infrastructure to support new lawyers after graduation.\textsuperscript{569} Project Rural Practice has been successful in its first five years, and it appears the new summer internship program will be effective in further promoting the program.


\textsuperscript{558} Stetz, supra note ___ (ranking USD Law sixth in 2017).

\textsuperscript{559} Interview by Hannah Haksgaard with Liz Taggart, Director of Law Sch. Admissions, Univ. of South Dakota School of Law, in Vermillion, S.D. (Dec. 4, 2017).

\textsuperscript{560} Id.

\textsuperscript{561} Gilbertson, supra note 543, at 441.

\textsuperscript{562} Interview by Hannah Haksgaard with Devra Hermosilla, Director of Career Services at the University of South Dakota School of Law, in Vermillion, S.D. (Nov. 14, 2017).

\textsuperscript{563} Id. Although the director of career services at USD Law manages the program, the program is available to first- and second-year students from other law schools who attended high school or college in South Dakota. Id.

\textsuperscript{564} Id.

\textsuperscript{565} Id.

\textsuperscript{566} Id.

\textsuperscript{567} Id.

\textsuperscript{568} See supra Part I.C.3 (discussing a similar bus tour program, the Greater Wisconsin Initiative Bus tour) and Part I.A.4. (discussing a similar bus tour program in California, One Justice’s Justice Bus).

\textsuperscript{569} Nebraska has several initiatives to promote rural practice. Nebraska conducts a bus tour every spring break where it takes law students and new attorneys around rural Nebraska to meet judges and practitioners. Rural Practice Initiative (RPI), Neb. STATE BAR ASS’N, http://www.nebar.com/page/RPI [https://perma.cc/A5CM-5W74]. Nebraska also boasts the Rural Law Opportunities Program, which provides funds for law students to intern in rural areas. Id. Finally, Nebraska provides scholarships for high school students from rural communities to attend college with automatic entrance to the Nebraska College of Law, with the expectation that those students will graduate and practice law in rural communities. See, e.g.,
4. Conclusion

Despite the apparent early success of the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program, questions remain about its long-term efficacy. The incentive payments continue for five years, meaning the first participants will soon be losing this source of income. It remains to be seen if there will be attrition once incentive payments stop, but all indications are that participants’ practices are doing well financially. This is not to say that the rural lawyer shortage has been solved in South Dakota: large areas with too few or no lawyers remain. As discussed, Indian Country poses a particular challenge. This is partly a consequence of the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program’s failure to contemplate direct negotiation with tribal governments.

In its first five years, the success of Project Rural Practice and the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program has been outstanding. As a result of the program, fifteen new attorneys are currently practicing in some of South Dakota’s most rural areas and, based on the number of contracts signed, that number will soon reach nineteen attorneys, with more in the pipeline. Student interest in the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program remains high at USD Law. Project Rural Practice hosts a fall summit each year at USD Law, which serves as a yearly update, as well as a recruiting tool. At the 2017 fall summit, thirteen students attended the recruitment meeting, expressing an interest in joining the program after graduation. There is no indication that the state bar, the state legislature, USD Law, the rural municipalities and counties of the state, or prospective rural lawyers are losing interest in Project Rural Practice. In fact, the coordinators of the program are already contemplating whether to seek additional funding for more placements. Chief Justice Gilbertson believes Project Rural Practice may well expand past thirty-two attorneys and that “the limits of the program are only hemmed in by our lack of creativity.”

II. THEMES AMONG STATES SURVEYED

In the states we surveyed and, indeed, across the United States, rural Americans’ legal needs are growing, even as the number of rural lawyers is shrinking. As a result, despite variations in

Karen Sloan, How to Lure Lawyers to Small Town USA? Start There, LAW.COM (Nov. 1, 2016), https://www.law.com/sites/almstaff/2016/11/01/how-to-lure-lawyers-to-small-town-usa-start-there/?siteId=2017011072523 [https://perma.cc/H3F6-QDLW]; Lorelei Laird, University of Nebraska launches program encouraging more attorneys in state’s rural areas, ABA JOURNAL, Oct. 27, 2016, http://www.abajournal.com/news/article/university_of_nebraska_launches_program_encouraging_more_attorneys_in_rural. North Dakota has also dedicated some funds to incentivizing rural practice, but has only done so with law students, not graduates. In 2014 a funded summer internship program began where the state judiciary pays for up to three law students to spend the summer interning with a state judge in a rural area. Rand, supra note __, at 1030–31. Additional private funding has since allowed for an expansion of the paid summer internship program to students working outside the judicial system and for scholarships designated for students from, or intending to practice in, North Dakota. Id. at 1032.

570 See supra Part I.E.2. (noting no participants have been placed in Indian Country and the difficulties of potential placement).

571 See S.D. CODIFIED LAWS § 16-23-7 (West, Westlaw through laws of 2018 Reg. Sess. effective March 21, 2018, and Supreme Court Rule 17-12) (allowing “[a]ny rural county or municipality” to contract and appropriate funds for the Rural Attorney Assistance Program, but not contemplating that tribal governments will do the same).

572 Gilbertson Interview, supra note 543.

573 The Project Rural Practice Fall Summit has led directly to at least one placement. Bill Coester, looking for an associate for his practice, attended the Fall Summit at USD Law several years ago and was then contacted by a prospective participant who is now an associate at Coester’s law firm. E-mail from Coester, supra note 532.

574 Gilbertson Interview, supra note 543.

575 Just two reasons for this growth, among low-income clients in particular, are the increasingly complicated requirements for securing public benefits under the Trump administration and the burgeoning problem of rural homelessness, which is closely related to the need for eviction defense. See Lisa R. Pruitt and Rebecca H. Williams, Safety-Net Work Requirements as a Mismatch for Rural America, in POVERTY STATES (Ezra Rosser, ed., forthcoming 2019 Cambridge University Press); SONYA SALAMON AND KATHERINE MAC-TAVISH, SINGLEWIDE: CHASING THE AMERICAN DREAM IN A RURAL TRAILER PARK 237, 250-258 (2017).
geography, economies, politics, and demographics, the deck seems consistently stacked against rural residents’ ability to access justice. In the face of these troubling trends, states are experimenting with various policy interventions to rectify the precarious imbalance.⁵⁷⁶ In this Part, we highlight a number of themes which emerge from the state surveys. These include lagging legal aid funding in rural communities; the relationship between race and poverty; rural attorney shortages which are partly a consequence of the attrition of aging rural attorneys and the shortage of new attorneys willing to take their places and measures states have taken to offset attrition. Apart from the rural attorney shortage, we discuss common barriers to rural access to justice and policy maker responses. We close with some thoughts on the political landscape in the surveyed states.

A. Lagging Legal Aid Funding

Rural areas share similarities with urban and suburban areas in that legal aid providers everywhere struggle to meet legal needs with inadequate resources. Despite evidence that dollars spent on legal aid yield a considerable return on investment,⁵⁷⁷ across-the-board scarcity of legal aid resources persists and, indeed, legal aid funds are dwindling in many states. In Maine, where state legal aid dollars are tied to revenue from civil filing fees and lawyers’ trust accounts, the state saw a 29% drop in funding between 2008 and 2013.⁵⁷⁸ No Wisconsin tax dollars are currently directed to legal aid, meaning that the state’s two non-profit civil legal aid providers must now rely more heavily on funding from LSC, which has also seen its funding per poor person drop precipitously in recent years.⁵⁷⁹ In South Dakota, a lack of direct state funding leaves the two legal aid providers heavily reliant on LSC funding.⁵⁸⁰ And, of course, President Trump has recently proposed eliminating LSC funding entirely.⁵⁸¹

Rural residents often bear the brunt of the funding cuts. Disproportionately high rural poverty rates suggest that rural areas should receive greater amounts of available legal aid funding, but we did not find that to be the case.⁵⁸² In California, for example, legal aid organizations that serve low-income rural Californians receive less than a third of the per person funding that flows to organizations serving urban populations.⁵⁸³ Wisconsin’s funding mechanisms also do not consider the challenges associated with the delivery of services to spatially dispersed populations.⁵⁸⁴

It is possible that rural-urban funding disparities are even more widespread than the California and Wisconsin data suggest. A lack of complete and publicly available data on legal aid spending per person undermines our ability to compare—on an apples-to-apples basis—this trend across the states. Many legal aid organizations are reluctant to divulge too much information about their funding sources because they compete with other providers for scarce resources. Despite these data gaps, a


⁵⁷⁷ See ABA JOURNAL, supra note [248] (“More than 30 cost-benefit studies all show that legal aid delivers far more in benefits than it costs”).

⁵⁷⁸ See supra Part I.D.2. (discussing funding for legal aid providers in Maine).

⁵⁷⁹ See ABA JOURNAL, supra note [248]; see also supra Part I.C.1.a. (discussing funding for Wisconsin’s two civil legal aid providers).

⁵⁸⁰ See supra Part I.E.1. (discussing funding for South Dakota’s two civil legal aid providers).


⁵⁸² Pruitt & Showman, supra note [19], at 496 (“Because rural populations are disproportionately poor and because lawyers (legal aid attorneys or otherwise) are scarce in rural areas, we can surmise that rural residents—especially those who are low-income—are less likely than their urban counterparts to have their legal needs met.”).

⁵⁸³ See supra Part I.A.1. (noting $18.56 per poor resident in rural counties compared to $44.43 per poor resident in urban counties).

⁵⁸⁴ See supra Part I.C.1.a. (explaining the limitations faced by Judicare, Wisconsin’s sole rural legal aid provider).
national empirical study has established that public interest law organizations “are geographically distributed in ways that disadvantage rural and poor communities.”

The importance of funding legal aid adequately and appropriately, including consideration of the particular challenges of proffering legal services in rural areas, cannot be overstated. We should also acknowledge, however, that even if legal aid funding were plentiful, legal services organizations could not meet the needs of every rural resident, or even the needs of every poor rural resident. In addition to the institutional limitations all LSC-funded organizations face, rural legal aid organizations are also hampered by the conflicts of interest inherent in rural legal practice. If only one legal aid provider is present in a county, only one side of a dispute between otherwise eligible residents will be able to obtain services.

Further, LSC funding comes with restrictions on the types of cases and clients for which the money can be used. Among other restrictions, LSC prohibits recipients of its funding from engaging in certain types of legal matters altogether, even when the funds and lawyers used to engage in such work are compartmentalized from LSC funds. For example, receipt of any LSC funding by a legal aid organization means that the organization cannot perform some types of immigration work. For states like California, where rural regions often include significant immigrant populations, such restrictions severely limit the local legal needs to which LSC-funded organizations can respond.

B. Race and Poverty

Perhaps contrary to popular perception, many rural areas of the states we surveyed are racially and ethnically diverse. For instance, almost 40% of California’s overall population identifies as Latinx, including nearly that great a percentage of its rural population. Californians are well aware of the Latinx population in the Central Valley, but they are nevertheless hard to reach, especially outside urban clusters like Modesto, Fresno, and Bakersfield, county seats that anchor vast agriculture-intensive counties with enormous legal needs. Georgia’s rural and small-town African-American population is more than three times the national average. Nine percent of South Dakotans are Native American, though they are heavily clustered on nine rural reservations. Significant Hmong, Latinx, and Native American populations reside in the rural Northland of Wisconsin and Minnesota. And Maine, despite being one of the whitest states in the nation, also has many Native American residents; indeed, they comprise nearly half of the population in one county. Each of these rural populations faces distinct barriers to access to justice, barriers which typically include the entrenched and intergenerational nature of poverty in their communities.
Indeed, the overlap between our nation’s poorest rural communities and racial disadvantage is well illustrated by the phenomenon of “persistent poverty,” a U.S. government designation for counties that have had high poverty rates (in excess of 20%) for the last 30 years. Of 353 persistent poverty counties in the United States, 301 are nonmetro. A quick glance at the persistent poverty map reveals that four races or ethnicities are overrepresented in certain persistent poverty regions: Native Americans in the west and southwest, Latinx populations in the Rio Grande Valley, African Americans in the Mississippi Delta and Black Belt, and Whites in Appalachia and the Ozark highlands. The highest poverty rates, however—those spiking to 30% and greater—are typically found in the first three of those regions, those home to racial and ethnic minorities.

The relative invisibility of rural ethnic and racial minorities within our nation’s collective consciousness, however, means these communities’ particular vulnerability and needs are often overlooked. Some consequences of this invisibility can be seen in the findings of our state surveys. For instance, South Dakota’s Native American population suffers from a particularly dire shortage of lawyers; the only South Dakota county without a lawyer is part of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. Moreover, none of the fifteen participants in the state’s Rural Attorney Recruitment Program has been placed on a reservation, partly because contracts cannot be signed with tribal governments. Likewise, in four residents of Echols County, Georgia, does not speak English at home; thus a language barrier aggravates access challenges in a county that already lacks a single practicing attorney. In northern Minnesota and Wisconsin, the landscape of legal advocacy includes prominent Hmong communities but very few Hmong attorneys, tribal communities with vastly different natural and socioeconomic resources and court capacities, and East African and Latinx populations who often experience profound legal and employment precarity but who may not qualify for legal assistance owing to immigration status and LSC requirements.

C. Rural Attorney Shortages

While legal services organizations do critically important work for qualifying clients and matters, the rural access to justice crisis extends beyond an assessment of the adequacy (or lack thereof) of legal aid and to a shortage of rural lawyers more broadly. Rural northern Wisconsin suffers attorney-to-resident ratios as poor as 1:4,452. Courts in rural Wisconsin face a backlog of cases because there are too few (and over-burdened) local lawyers, but also because attorneys from other areas

599 See id. Nearly 84% of persistent poverty counties are in the South. However, the small size of southern counties puts this in context.
600 See Mara Casey Tieken, There’s a Big Part of Rural America that Everyone’s Ignoring, WASH. POST (Mar. 24, 2017), https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/theres-a-big-part-of-rural-america-that-everyones-ignoring/2017/03/24/d06d24d0-1010-11e7-ab07-07d9f521f6b5_story.html?utm_term=.99d0f48fdba4 [https://perma.cc/7MJL-JPRS]; HOUSING ASSISTANCE COUNCIL, supra note [489].
601 Directory, supra note 476.
603 As of April, 2018, Pahoua Thao is one of the few, if not the only, Hmong or Hmong-American attorney in beca. http://www.zkklaw.com/Attorneys/Pahoua-Thao.shtml. Milwaukee County Circuit Judge, Kashoua Yang, is the first Hmong-American judge in the state. See Lakshmi Gandhi, Attorney Kristy Yang Hopes to Become Wisconsin’s First Hmong-American Judge. NBC News, March 13, 2017.
605 Molvig, supra note 345.
606 See Table 2.
are unwilling to accept low pay and mileage reimbursements to represent clients there.\footnote{See Meeker Data, supra not 106 and Table 9.} In California, the ratio of attorneys to poor residents is roughly four times higher in its rural areas than in urban ones.\footnote{See Table 2.} Similarly, over half of South Dakotans reside in the state’s rural areas, but only a small fraction of the state’s 1,800 active attorneys live and work there.\footnote{See id.} And in Georgia, the 154 counties outside of the five-county metropolitan Atlanta area are home to sixty-five percent of the state’s population, but only thirty percent of its attorneys.\footnote{See supra note 44.} Younger members of the Maine Bar live and work primarily in populous areas, mostly in the southern part of the state.\footnote{See Christopher Chavis, Quantifying the rural lawyer shortage—a summary and progress report \textit{LEGAL RURALISM} (Nov. 18, 2017), http://legalruralism.blogspot.com/2017/11/quantifying-rural-lawyer-shortage.html [https://perma.cc/E7RY-T3XR].} We have reason to believe that these states are typical—that attorney shortages are endemic to rural areas across the country.\footnote{The \textsc{Justice Gap}, supra note 9, at 9, 13-14, 40-44 (“Low-income Americans will receive insufficient or no legal help for an estimated 1.1 million eligible problems this year alone… A lack of available resources accounts for the vast majority of eligible civil legal problems that go unserved or underserved.”)} Without enough lawyers, the legal needs of residents—whatever their income, demographics, or legal issues—cannot be met.\footnote{See supra Section I.A.2 (referring to California rural attorney statistics); supra Section I.E.1 (referring to South Dakota rural attorney statistics).}

Unfortunately, the realities associated with the abysmal attorney-to-resident ratios may be worse than our data suggest. As was the caveat to the California data, the numbers do not necessarily indicate how many attorneys are available to represent clients, as even “active” status attorneys in any given location may not be in private practice or have expertise in a particular field of law (or at all).\footnote{See supra Part I.E.2. (discussing Gregory County’s attorney shortage).} The vignette of Gregory County, South Dakota illustrates this problem: although the county has seven “active” resident attorneys, none are typically available for court-appointed cases.\footnote{See supra Part I.A.2. (discussing Si<ref>ra County’s attorney shortage).} Similarly, Sierra County, California’s five lawyers include only one available to represent private clients.\footnote{For example, four of the five Georgia counties without active attorneys are located in the Southwest corner of the state, bordering Alabama. \textit{ supra} Part I.B.2. The same issue arises in eastern California, where the nearest lawyer may be in neighboring Nevada. \textit{ supra} Part I.A.2.} Conflicts of interest, which increase in frequency as the local lawyer population decreases, aggravate the strain.

Many counties with too few attorneys are contiguous to others with the same deficit, so that engaging an attorney in a neighboring county may also prove difficult, even for those who can afford to travel.\footnote{See Emily Green, \textit{With Budgets Tight, Small Towns Go Without Courthouses}, \textit{NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO} (Aug. 6, 2013), https://www.npr.org/2013/08/06/206948225/with-budgets-tight-small-towns-go-without-courthouses (discussing a courthouse closure in Fresno County, California).} Moreover, a lack of attorneys in counties bordering another state may thwart the efforts of residents to find legal counsel because the nearest attorney is located and licensed only in the neighboring state.\footnote{See supra Part I.C.2.b. (noting judge shortage in rural Minnesota).} Though lawyer shortages are the most obvious barrier to rural access to justice, Minnesota has identified a shortage of another lynchpin in the justice equation—judges.\footnote{See Meeker Data, supra note 351.} National media have reported on the related issue of courthouse closures in California and Mississippi.\footnote{See supra note 351.} Without enough lawyers, the legal needs of residents—whatever their income, demographics, or legal issues—cannot be met.\footnote{See supra Part I.C.2.b. (noting judge shortage in rural Minnesota).}

\section{Rural Lawyer Attrition and the Lack of Replacements}

Our state surveys indicate that the primary reason for dwindling attorney numbers in rural areas is that lawyers there are aging and retiring, and too few new lawyers are stepping forward to take their
place.\textsuperscript{622} The national median age of attorneys increased by ten years between 1980 and 2005,\textsuperscript{623} but the trend is more acute among rural attorneys, as our surveys of Georgia, Wisconsin, and Minnesota confirm.\textsuperscript{624} Maine does not have rural-specific data on the age of its attorneys, though we know that the highest percentage of Maine attorneys, age-wise, fall within 10 years of the traditional retirement age of 65 and that new lawyers tend to be concentrated in the metropolitan areas of Southern Maine.\textsuperscript{625} Moreover, the state is perennially ranked as one of the oldest states in the country,\textsuperscript{626} with slight gains in population due primarily to an influx of immigrants and refugees.\textsuperscript{627} Although “greying of the bar” data were not available for California and South Dakota, anecdotal evidence suggests that rural attorneys in those states are also older than state averages.\textsuperscript{628}

In California, young lawyers’ decisions not to pursue rural practice may be attributed at least in part to the high cost of a legal education and resultant student debt.\textsuperscript{629} If metropolitan salaries for California attorneys significantly outpace those of their rural counterparts—and most assume that they do—\textsuperscript{630} student loan debt is an economic deterrent to rural practice. This fact likely holds true for law school graduates in other states, too.\textsuperscript{631} Recall that lawyer survey respondents in Maine cited too low-income as a reason to forego rural practice,\textsuperscript{632} despite Maine Law’s tuition being less than half of that paid by the typical graduate of an ABA-AALS-Accredited law school in California.\textsuperscript{633} Similar concerns surfaced in a 2014-15 survey of Arkansas lawyers and law students,\textsuperscript{634} as well as in a closed-door discussion between South Dakota’s Chief Justice and a group of USD law students.\textsuperscript{635}

Yet respondents are presumably merely speculating about low salaries because little evidence is available. Indeed, the data from the one state for which we did find salary information—Texas—indicate that in many specialties and in general practice, rural attorneys’ earnings outpace those of

\textsuperscript{622} See Pruitt et al., \textit{Justice in the Hinterlands}, supra note 29, at 596-599.
\textsuperscript{623} Aging Lawyers Task Force Presentation, \textit{supra} note 280.
\textsuperscript{624} Data in Arkansas show that rural attorneys in that state also tend to be older than the state average. See Pruitt et al., \textit{Justice in the Hinterlands}, supra note 29, at 602.
\textsuperscript{625} \textit{See supra} Part 1.D.2 (discussing Maine’s greying bar).
\textsuperscript{626} \textit{See supra} Part 1.D.1 (noting that Maine ranks “annually among the oldest and whitest states in the nation”).
\textsuperscript{627} \textit{See id.} (noting Maine’s net population growth is reliant on its foreign-born population).
\textsuperscript{628} See C. Ingrid Larsson, \textit{supra} note 131 (showing the year of admission of the only lawyer in private practice in Sierra County, California); Bronner, \textit{supra} note 517 (profiling elderly attorney Fred Cozad, who has since died).
\textsuperscript{629} \textit{See supra} Part 1.D.3 (“When respondents were asked what influenced their decision not to pursue rural practice, the most selected reason was “lack of professional opportunities for partner,” with “income too low” a very close second.”); Drisko Zago, \textit{supra} note [19], at 36 (“Law school debt is a huge burden to new graduates and is a significant barrier to starting rural practices.”).
\textsuperscript{630} \textit{See supra} Part 1.A.4 (discussing why California’s law students may be unwilling to practice in rural areas).
\textsuperscript{631} \textit{But see} Lindsay Stafford Mader, \textit{Way Out Yonder}, 78 Tex. Bar J. 524, 526 (2015) (finding the median salary for rural attorneys in Texas exceeded the median salaries for Austin, Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio).
\textsuperscript{632} \textit{See supra} Part 1.D.3. (noting survey showed “income too low” and “lack of professional opportunities for partner” as the two most-identified barriers).
\textsuperscript{633} \textit{Compare Tuition and Fees}, \textit{MAINE LAW}, \url{https://mainelaw.maine.edu/admissions/financing-your-education/tuition-and-fees/} (last accessed June 1, 2018) (explaining that Maine resident tuition for the 2017-2018 school year is $22,290 plus other assorted fees) with \textit{What Are The Priciest Law Schools?}, \textit{supra} note 185 (explaining the average tuition and fees for California’s public law schools was $46,453 in 2018).
\textsuperscript{634} See Pruitt, et al., \textit{Justice in the Hinterlands}, \textit{supra} note 37, at 637 (reporting the reasons given by Arkansas lawyers and law students for choosing not to practice in a rural locale; of 128 UA Fayetteville students answering “yes”, “no”, or “don’t know” to the question of whether they planned to practice in a Rural County, 60% ranked “perception that I would earn a lower income” and 52% ranked “perception that rural areas offer fewer career and economic opportunities” as top two most discouraging factors. \textit{Id} at 637. Among 221 respondents at the University of Arkansas Little Rock Bowen School of Law, the factors “most discouraging” of rural practice were “perception that I would earn a lower income; “perceived inability to find clients/perceived lack of career and economic opportunities”; and “relative lack of entertainment, restaurant and other similar amenities associated with cities.” \textit{Id} at 637. \textit{Cf.} Wandler, \textit{Supply and Demand, supra} note [ ], at 250 (reporting student survey indicating 74% of students were open to practicing in a town with a population of 10,000 or less).
\textsuperscript{635} Gilbertson, \textit{supra} note 469, at 439 (noting that fifteen of sixteen students would consider rural practice, but students were most concerned with finances).
their urban counterparts. Data like these need to be more widely shared, and more data tracking salaries along the rural-urban continuum should be gathered to explore the validity of the presumption that rural markets are consistently synonymous with lower remuneration.

While federal income-based student loan repayment has alleviated some concerns regarding income, law schools’ loan repayment assistance programs (LRAPs) could also play a greater role. LRAPs rarely extend benefits to those entering private practice, even if that practice is in an underserved area. Indeed, California’s 2015 Civil Justice Strategies Task Force Report and Recommendations advocated for expansion of LRAP programs to “include attorneys in small or solo practices focused on addressing the needs of low and modest means clients.” Such programs could further entice law graduates into rural practice.

As a related matter, the primary reason cited by Maine lawyer survey respondents for deciding against solo legal practice—whether rural or urban—was “income instability.” This concern may provide further insights into the success of the South Dakota program: Income subsidies such as those on offer there help smooth out the income gaps that are likely part and parcel of solo and small firm practice.

Concern about income instability, as articulated in the Maine survey, also hints at insecurity about one’s skills fresh out of law school. It suggests that a lack of preparedness for what rural and solo legal practices entail, and not merely the size of one’s income, is of concern to recent graduates considering next career moves. That, in turn, suggests a role for law schools to educate practice-ready lawyers with the small-business savvy to market their practices to a range of clients, including those of modest means. That skill set is typically a focus of incubator programs. By way of example, Baylor Law School sponsors the Legal Mapmaker program, which is open to all Texas law school graduates. Through a three-day seminar, Legal Mapmaker aims to prepare young lawyers to open their own firms by equipping them with the tools to practice efficiently as they provide affordable services. Law schools could teach such skills to more would-be rural lawyers during law school, something a few are starting to experiment with.

Other obstacles to rural practice that have been identified elsewhere include limited career opportunities for lawyers’ life partners, perceived lack of amenities and basic services in rural communities, lack of anonymity, negative attitudes towards rural people, and an expectation of rural bias towards minorities and women, to name a few. Clearly, each of these obstacles must be addressed if new pathways to rural practice are to be forged and rural practice made attractive to young lawyers.

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But see Lindsay Stafford Mader, Way Out Yonder, 78 Tex. Bar J. 524, 526 (2015) (finding the median salary for rural attorneys in Texas outperformed the median salaries for Austin, Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio).


See supra Part I.D.3. (noting survey showed “income too low” and “lack of professional opportunities for partner” as the two most-identified barriers).


Id.


See supra Part I.D.3. (noting survey showed “income too low” and “lack of professional opportunities for partner” as the two most-identified barriers); see also Pruitt et al., Justice in the Hinterlands, supra note [ ], at 646.

See, e.g., supra Part I.A.4 (discussing reasons other than cost that California’s law students are not willing to move to rural areas); see also Pruitt et al., Justice in the Hinterlands, supra note [ ], at 646.

Recall that at least one female lawyer in rural Wisconsin felt discriminated against by judges. Supra Part I.C.2.a.
2. Measures Taken to Offset Attrition

Several states have responded to the rural lawyer shortage by attempting to increase the number of their law school graduates who enter rural legal practice. For example, the state of Wisconsin, following Nebraska’s lead, organized a bus tour to take law students and recent law school graduates to rural areas in order to familiarize them with rural practice opportunities.646 The bus tour has been credited with improving Judicare’s recruitment efforts.647 Similarly, several California law schools have participated in OneJustice’s Justice Bus, which takes students and attorneys into rural areas to staff short-term legal clinics.648 While these efforts potentially whet students’ appetite for rural practice, law schools and other stakeholder institutions can do more—beyond visits limited in time and scope—to emphasize the ongoing needs in rural communities.

The Maine Law Rural Lawyer Project takes law student integration into rural practice a step further, pairing law students with practitioners in under-served rural communities with the hope that students will choose to practice there after graduation.649 Similarly, a California summer fellowship supports students who are interested in a public interest career to work in a rural area or on a rural issue.650 Project Rural Practice in South Dakota began a similar summer rural placement program in 2017,651 and North Dakota funds summer internships for law students through the Rural Justice Program.652 Georgia’s Succession Planning Pilot Program connects retiring solo practitioners with new law graduates to facilitate succession of the practice.653 On the national level, Legal Services Corporation and Equal Justice Works offer Rural Summer Legal Corps, which places students with rural civil legal aid organizations across the country.654

That brings us to programs that create financial incentives for lawyers to engage in rural practice. In January 2018, the Board of Trustees of the State Bar of California requested and heard data regarding the state’s rural attorney shortages, legal education costs, student debt, and loan repayment assistance programs. When the Board finalized its strategic plan two months later, however, it set no goals regarding rural issues.656 North Dakota has also contemplated a loan-forgiveness program for rural attorneys, but no progress has been made.657 The Maine legislature is considering an annual tax credit for a limited number of lawyers who choose to practice in that state’s rural areas.658 Finally, a bill recently proposed in Wisconsin would provide student loan payments for lawyers who represent low-income, rural criminal defendants.659

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646 See supra Part I.C.3 (discussing Wisconsin’s bus tour).
647 Id.; Green, supra note 377.
648 Justice Bus Project, supra note 203.
650 See supra Part I.A.4 (discussing the Dan Bradley Fellowship).
651 See supra Part I.E.3 (profiling the summer placement part of Project Rural Practice).
652 Rand, supra note 465, at 1030.
653 Note that this program is not limited to rural practitioners. Supra Part B.2. See also Martha Neil, In a rural county that lacks lawyers, seemingly no one wants to buy a successful law practice, ABA JOURNAL, Nov. 3, 2014, http://www.abajournal.com/news/article/in_a_rural_county_that_lacks_lawyers_no_one_seemingly_wants_to_buy_a_sucessful_practice.
656 See supra Part I.A.3. (discussing the 2018 failure to include rural issues in the five access-to-justice objectives).
657 Rand, supra note 465, at 1033 (“Possible future expansion of the Rural Justice Program is under discussion. Potential goals include . . . seeking state support for a loan forgiveness program modeled after South Dakota’s Rural Attorney Recruitment Program.”).
658 See supra Part I.D.4. (discussing the proposal and current legislative posture of LD 1680).
659 See supra Part I.C.3. (discussing proposed law in Wisconsin).
Among the states surveyed, and, indeed, among all of the United States, South Dakota has undertaken the most comprehensive attempt to encourage law school graduates to take up rural practice. In short, various stakeholders—including the counties where lawyers are placed—have put their money where their mouth is. The state’s only law school consistently touts its support of—and the many opportunities for—rural practice, starting with a speech by the state’s Chief Justice, long-time champion of the initiative, at 1L orientation. While this high-profile legitimization of rural practice should not be understated, it is South Dakota’s fiscal support of rural legal practice through the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program that most differentiates it from the rest of the country. Indeed, the fact that South Dakota has succeeded in making rural practice attractive shows it can be done. Young lawyers—including some with no prior connection to the state—have responded to proffered financial and mentoring support, and we have reason to believe that rural areas of other states can be made equally attractive with financial incentives.

D. Other Barriers to Access

Our state surveys indicate that the shortage of practicing lawyers in rural areas is compounded by other barriers to access. Some rural residents do not have computers, reliable cell phone service or data access, or home access to the internet. These deficits hinder residents’ ability to communicate with an attorney or to access other forms of legal assistance, including self-help websites. Lack of transportation is an additional barrier to legal assistance, and immigrant communities may face language. Indeed, illiteracy and health problems will also likely keep many low-income rural clients from accessing attorneys, in both the states we surveyed and beyond. Moreover, the fact that some states run decentralized court systems, which can result in inconsistencies in court processes among neighboring courts, further impedes meaningful access. With so many obstacles between themselves and legal services, rural residents may cease to recognize their legal rights. Those thwarted in efforts to engage the legal system may come to see the law as irrelevant to them, thus disconnecting vulnerable populations from justice, both cognitively and practically.

E. Measures Taken to Increase Access

The states we surveyed employ various strategies to bridge the rural-urban justice gap. These include direct client interaction via legal aid organizations, alternative dispute resolution programs, including self-help websites. Lack of transportation is an additional barrier to legal assistance, and immigrant communities may face language. Indeed, illiteracy and health problems will also likely keep many low-income rural clients from accessing attorneys, in both the states we surveyed and beyond. Moreover, the fact that some states run decentralized court systems, which can result in inconsistencies in court processes among neighboring courts, further impedes meaningful access. With so many obstacles between themselves and legal services, rural residents may cease to recognize their legal rights. Those thwarted in efforts to engage the legal system may come to see the law as irrelevant to them, thus disconnecting vulnerable populations from justice, both cognitively and practically.

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660 See supra Part I.E.3. (noting the appearance of Chief Justice David Gilbertson every year for orientation).
661 See supra Part I.E. (noting the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program is unique in funding post-graduate rural legal jobs).
662 See, e.g., Levitz & Bauerlein, supra note 27; Boon, supra note 27; and Inbody, supra note 27.
663 See Lisa R. Pruitt & Marta Vanegas, Urban Normality, Spatial Privilege and Judicial Blind Spots in Abortion Law, 30 Berkeley J. of Gender, L. & Just. 76, 105-112 (2015) (discussing Justice Souter’s dissent in Crawford v. Marion Cty., 553 U.S. 181, 197 (2008), which recognized the relevance of lack of public transportation to the right to vote, a circumstance easily analogized to accessing justice systems and legal services.)
664 See e.g., supra Part I.B.2. (profiling Echols County, Georgia, and the language barriers there).
665 See supra Part I.B.1. (Georgia) and Part I.C.2.a. (Wisconsin).
666 See e.g., supra Part I.C.2.a. (providing an example of how the court system in Northern Wisconsin impedes legal representation).
667 See generally Lisa R. Pruitt, The Rural Lawscape: Space Tames Law Tames Space, in The Expanding Spaces of Law: A Timely Legal Geography (Nicholas Blomley et al., eds., 2014) (theorizing the ways in which law an ordering force and rural spatiality are in tension with each, arguing that material spatiality—sheer distance—thwarts the efforts of law, which in turn causes rural residents to see law are less relevant to their lives). We have no recent empirical studies of how attitudes toward law differ between rural and urban populations. Earlier, germinal studies include Robert C. Ellickson, Order without Law: How Neighbors Settle Disputes (1994); David Engel, The Oven Bird’s Song: Insiders, Outsiders and Personal Injuries in an American Community, 18 Law and Society Rev. 551(1984).
668 Of course, many states that we did not survey have also undertaken rural access-to-justice initiatives. Where current and relevant, we have endeavored to cite to those initiatives herein. For a 2003 report regarding rural access to justice initiatives across the country at the time, see Rural Pro Bono Delivery: A Guide to Pro Bono Legal Services in Rural Areas, A.B.A. (2003),
online channels to lawyers such as the ABA’s Free Legal Answers website, and in-person clinics staffed by volunteer attorneys to assist pro se litigants. The types of offerings and the ways in which they are employed vary significantly from state to state. In addition, California, Georgia, and Minnesota run public law libraries, as well as self-help websites and/or centers to serve those without a lawyer.\(^679\) Law libraries, often at the county level, may be similar to the Northern Wisconsin Legal Advice Project in that a lawyer is typically on site to answer questions, but stops short of legal representation.\(^672\) On the other hand, we have reason to believe that county law libraries and related self-help centers are less effective in rural counties than in urban ones, given the resource and personnel deficits associated with rural infrastructure.\(^673\)

Nevertheless, some self-help centers are clearly meeting critical needs. The Family Law Information Center (FLIC) in Northern Georgia is a court-based program designed specifically for residents facing family law issues; it provides self-help resources for pro se litigants and one-time consultation appointments with volunteer attorneys.\(^674\) In far northern California, an award-winning self-help program serves multiple counties by deploying video conferencing technology.\(^575\) Likewise, self-help websites such as GeorgiaLegalAid.org\(^676\) and LawHelpMN.org,\(^677\) as well as the Wisconsin and Georgia Free Legal Answers websites,\(^678\) provide forms and information without the direct assistance of a lawyer.

### H. The Political Landscape

The states we surveyed run the political gamut from very blue California, the most urban and left-leaning among the states studied, to very red South Dakota, the most rural among our six states.\(^679\) Of the remaining four states surveyed, only Minnesota has leaned blue in recent years. Yet what we see across these six geographically, demographically, and politically varied states is that rural populations generally have little political clout when it comes to advocating successfully for their own justice system needs.\(^680\) Many initiatives to ameliorate the rural lawyer shortage and other rural

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\(^670\) See supra note [ ] .

\(^671\) CAL. CODE, BUS. \\ & PROF. CODE § 6300 (West, Westlaw through Ch. 9 of 2018 Reg. Sess.) (“There is in each county of this State a board of law library trustees, which governs the law library established for the county under the provisions of this chapter.”); supra Part I.B.3 (discussing Georgia’s law libraries); supra Part I.C.1.b (noting the existence of county law libraries in Minnesota).

\(^672\) See e.g., supra Part I.C.1.b (noting that the Minnesota Judicial Branch’s website contains forms).

\(^673\) See supra Part I.C.3 (discussing Judicare’s Northern Wisconsin Legal Aid Advice Project).

\(^674\) See Self-Help Center, supra note 137 (discussing opening hours of Sierra County, California Self-Help Center, which refers clients to neighboring Nevada County).

\(^675\) See supra Part I.B.3 (discussing the function and success of FLIC).

\(^676\) See Family Law Facilitator for Lake County honored by state association, supra note 153 (discussing SHARP initiative in Lake, Butte, and Tehama counties in California).

\(^677\) GEORGIALAWAID.ORG, supra, note 279.

\(^678\) LAWHELPMN.ORG, supra, note 340.

\(^679\) See supra Part I.C.3 (explaining Judicare’s Northern Wisconsin Legal Advice Project and its adoption by the state bar); supra Part I.B.3 (explaining a website providing legal services hosted by the American Bar Association’s Free Legal Answers program).

justice system deficits—some with bipartisan support—have been proposed, but few have been funded and implemented.

That said, South Dakota has been the most responsive to rural needs. It is state whose institutions have best risen to the rural attorney shortage. This may be a reflection of the fact that nearly half of South Dakotans live in rural places.\textsuperscript{681} Thus, even though a Republican administration might generally not see a role for state intervention in access-to-justice matters—note that the state provides no funding for legal aid, rural or urban\textsuperscript{682}—rural constituencies do matter. Contrast that with California, where the Board of Trustees of the State Bar recently sought and heard detailed information about the rural attorney shortage but then chose not to set any goals regarding that shortage in its five-year strategic plan.\textsuperscript{683} In spite of California’s greater tendency generally to see state intervention as appropriate to correct market deficits, it has not prioritized rural. This failure to act may reflect the fact that just 2% of California’s population lives in rural areas.\textsuperscript{684}

III. PROPOSING NEW APPROACHES

Our state surveys provide a sampling of varied and well-intentioned policies aimed to improve rural access to justice. Yet our analysis also reveals that such attempts have thus far fallen short of meeting the significant legal needs of rural Americans.\textsuperscript{685} Where do we go from here? In the sub-parts that follow, we offer suggestions that implicate a range of stakeholders.

A. Collect and Analyze More Data

Gathering and analyzing data about the rural-urban justice gap are important starting points and should continue.\textsuperscript{686} Implementing effective and efficient policies to achieve parity in access to legal services requires a clear understanding of where the lawyers are and are not, these lawyers’ expertise, and how many of them are in private practice, among other information. In contrast, the utility of some of the data we rely upon herein is limited by its generality. California’s Meeker data, for example, do not distinguish “active” attorneys from “inactive” ones.\textsuperscript{687} Beyond the counting of active lawyers, it would be helpful to know the number of lawyers in any given jurisdiction who are actually available to represent clients, a factor which becomes increasingly relevant as the number of lawyers dwindles in a particular locale.\textsuperscript{688} Gregory County, South Dakota, and Sierra County, California, provide clear illustrations that having a small but seemingly critical mass of lawyers will not necessarily meet a community’s needs.\textsuperscript{689}


\textsuperscript{682} See supra Part I.E.1 (reporting on the South Dakota’s lack of state funding for legal aid).

\textsuperscript{683} See supra Part I.A.3 (detailing the 5-year strategic plan adopted by the Board of Trustees at its March 2018 Meeting).

\textsuperscript{684} Table 1.

\textsuperscript{685} See Chavis, supra note [262].

\textsuperscript{686} For an Australian perspective on data collection, see Simon Rice, Access to a Lawyer in Rural Australia: Thoughts on the Evidence we Need, 16 DEAKIN L. REV. 13 (2011).

\textsuperscript{687} Meeker E-mail, supra note 98.

\textsuperscript{688} Our studies indicate that more lawyers are registered and active than are generally available to represent clients. LSC grantees can only take certain kinds of cases; rural lawyers frequently work part-time for the government and accordingly have conflicts of interests, and some rural attorneys simply do not operate general practices. All of these limitations appear in every jurisdiction, but an example arises in our profile of Gregory County, South Dakota. Supra Part I.E.2.

\textsuperscript{689} See supra Part I.E.2. (discussing Gregory County’s attorney shortage) and supra Part I.A.2. (discussing Sierra County’s attorney shortage).
Data must also be collected to identify region-specific legal and non-legal problems and priorities, as well as the extent to which there is overlap among the needs identified by different stakeholders (e.g., area leaders, policy makers, local attorneys, and low-income community members). We know little about how rural people access and interact with the legal system or about particular legal needs that are unrecognized as such or otherwise are going unaddressed. This lack of understanding about rural legal needs and the responsiveness (or lack thereof) of available resources highlights the value of ethnographic research like that Michele Statz is conducting in the Northland of Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Consider also the findings from Georgia and Maine where legal deserts correspond to broader rural population declines. What common initiatives might be undertaken to recruit multiple categories of professionals to a particular rural area, and what more comprehensive rural revitalization might be achieved as a result? In just that vein, Georgia’s Rural Development Council has recommended legislative action to create incentives for rural living, especially for professional, high-wage earners. How might rural access to justice advocates contribute to and benefit from broader rural development efforts like those articulated for Georgia? Further exploration of the connection between the provision of legal services and a community’s economic and social well-being could help convince policymakers that alleviating the rural lawyer shortage and achieving broader rural access goals will be critical to any successful rural revival.

Once data-driven rural access-to-justice initiatives are implemented, data collection must continue so that the efficacy of initiatives can be assessed, and modifications and new directions informed. For instance, South Dakota’s Rural Attorney Recruitment Program must be assessed as incentive payments to the first group of participants cease. Will the attorneys choose to stay in the rural areas where they were placed beyond their initial five-year commitment? What are their reasons, at that juncture, for staying or leaving?

Though this program is only five years old, we already have useful data from participants. We know, for example, that law school graduates who attended law school outside South Dakota have used the program to return home to practice there. Less predictably, some lawyers with no previous ties to the state learned of the program through national media and decided to steer their careers to rural South Dakota to fulfill their public interest goals. These interim data provide South Dakota the opportunity to tweak, for example, its marketing strategy and applicant requirements. The data should also prove useful to states who might follow South Dakota’s lead. Policy makers elsewhere might assume that if financial incentives will draw lawyers to South Dakota, similar incentives might attract lawyers to the rural reaches of their states, too. The fact that some Project Rural Practice participants are from outside South Dakota could be particularly useful information for a state like California, where institutions would struggle to offer financial incentives commensurate with the very high cost of ABA-AALS accredited legal education there. California might nevertheless be able to offer financial incentives that would be attractive to those educated elsewhere, who are presumably less burdened by student debt.

Scholars and policy makers should compare data across state lines, as we have done, in order to enhance perspective and provide nuance. States should also endeavor to compare data within their own states, including across counties and along the rural-urban continuum. When engaging in any comparisons, however, researchers must maintain an awareness of methodological differences.

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690 See Rebecca Sandefur, Bridging the Gap: Rethinking Outreach for Greater Access to Justice, 37 UNIV. OF ARKANSAS LITTLE ROCK L. J. 721 (2015) (reviewing studies analyzing why people don’t take their legal needs to lawyers and court).
691 Supra Part I.B.
692 Supra Part I.D.
694 See RURAL DEV. COUNCIL, supra note [ ].
695 See supra Part I.E.4. (noting that the incentive payments for the first group of participants will end soon).
696 See supra Part I.E.2. (profiling Zach Pahlke and Jake Fischer).
697 See supra Part I.E.2. (profiling Kristen Kochekian and Jennifer English).
Caution is advisable when making state-to-state comparisons of attorneys-per-county numbers and other data measured at the county level. As earlier discussed, one reason for caution is the dramatic variation in the scale of the county: counties in eastern states tend to be much smaller than those in western states. By way of illustration, the average California county is more than seven times larger than the average Georgia county.  

Indeed, our state surveys confirm that the county is not always the best “unit” or scale for assessing adequacy of lawyer presence. Recall that South Dakota, though originally designating areas that qualify for the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program based solely on county population, revisited that policy because small communities in otherwise populous and vast counties continued to face lawyer shortages. Policy makers should thus consider other units of measurement, such as the MSSA scale used in California’s Meeker data, under the rationale that one should need to travel no farther to access basic legal services than she travels for basic medical services.

Acknowledging that the “county” may not be an ideal scale for studying rural attorney access to justice, it is nevertheless a logical scale that warrants careful—if also critical—consideration. After all, if every county has a courthouse and holds court within that jurisdiction, there will be a need for lawyers within reasonable proximity. Indeed, it is worth noting that an early goal of the Legal Services Corporation was to establish legal aid offices “in virtually every county in the country in an effort to ensure access to representation.” One can imagine the much more spatially equitable access-to-justice landscape if LSC had achieved that lofty goal.

While some of the data needed to evaluate the justice gap can be gathered without direct human interaction, the value of first-hand perspectives cannot be overstated. Again, qualitative and mixed-method data such as that gathered by Michele Statz’s NSF-funded project in northern Minnesota and Wisconsin is extremely valuable in informing our understanding of how a wide range of stakeholders view and engage—or fail to engage—the legal system. Likewise, survey data such as that collected from new attorneys in Maine and from attorneys and law students in Arkansas can prove valuable to understanding motivations and misconceptions that may stymie rural practice or otherwise undermine rural access to justice. Salary data along the rural-urban continuum, such as that collected by Texas, is also extremely useful.

Collecting qualitative data to assess rural legal needs and resources serves other purposes, too. The process of engaging in direct conversations and larger stakeholder meetings about the legal landscape in a certain country or region can foster a sense of shared purpose. That shared purpose, in turn, helps to encourage community and stakeholder input, as well as buy-in. Champions of access-to-justice initiatives may also emerge from these efforts, thus generating awareness of existing and new legal resources. That heightened awareness can lead to better utilization of those resources by clients, as well as better coordination of resource offerings among providers. This comprehensive process of information gathering through relationship building can be especially beneficial in rural communities, where great value is often placed upon interpersonal relationships, and where trust is critical.

Demographic data can shed light on variations among communities so that one-size-fits-all initiatives can be avoided. For example, while self-help information and legal forms made available via a state-sponsored website may prove valuable in urban areas, they may be relatively ineffective in

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698 See Table 7.
699 See S.D. Codified Laws § 16-23-1 (including 2017 amendment that allows “rural counties and municipalities” to participate in the program).
700 See supra Part I.A.2 (noting how Meeker used the Medical Service Study Areas (MSSAs) to categorize the study).
701 Albiston et al., supra note [604], at 999 (citing Alan Houseman, Legal Aid History, in POVERTY LAW MANUAL FOR THE NEW LAWYER 18-25).
702 See supra Part I.D.3 (discussing results of a study of new attorneys).
703 See Pruitt et al., Justice in the Hinterlands, supra note [ ].
704 See Stafford Mader, supra note [ ].
rural places if computer literacy rates are low and Internet access is spotty. Data about computer literacy and Internet access are thus critical when formulating policy interventions. Similarly, navigator programs may work well in cities, where an abundant supply of social workers and volunteers, including college students, are available to staff the court houses. Such programs may flounder in rural courthouses, where they may not attract sufficient volunteers because of human capital deficits. Data about infrastructure and human capital are thus critical when formulating policy interventions.

Indeed, broad differences between rural and urban settings are not the only ones which should be explored. Substantive legal needs may also vary from one rural place to the next. Farmworkers in California might, for example, regularly encounter a legal claim related to pesticide exposure associated with crops not grown in other parts of the country. The details of environmental justice claims will vary from community to community. Specific rural communities may have needs that are broader and more immediate, such as those arising in the aftermath of a natural disaster. Legal programming to address these needs must remain nimble in order to best meet the needs of a particular community at any given time.

At the same time, the best means of addressing specific legal needs can vary among rural places, even within the same state. For instance, the survey of Georgia revealed two impoverished counties with no lawyers. Clay County’s population is 60 percent African-American and suffers significant transportation deficits; home Internet is nearly non-existent. Meanwhile, in nearby Echols County, nearly a third of the county’s population is of Hispanic or Latinx origin and does not speak English at home, while only five percent of households there are without access to a vehicle. If we had reviewed only data on poverty rate and lawyers per county in Georgia, these two counties would look very similar: impoverished and in need of attorneys. The additional data, however, suggest that the best strategies for providing legal assistance in these counties may differ dramatically. Similar intrastate differences are apparent in California, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Maine, and South Dakota, where reservation residents not only face unique legal issues (most notably the maze that is tribal-state-federal jurisdictional questions), but also the prospect of needing a lawyer licensed in the

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705 Anecdotal evidence suggests that other methods not typically contemplated by access-to-justice reformers—for example, a legal help call-in television show that airs after the local news—may be a more effective means of reaching the public than information disseminated via website. Internet penetration is one of the county-level data points included on the Georgia State University Law School’s Access to Justice Map, http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/lessons_from_katrina

706 See supra Part I.D.1. (noting particular complications faced by tribes in northern Wisconsin and Northeastern Minnesota); supra Part I.D.1. (noting Maine’s Native American population in certain rural parts of the state); and supra Part I.E.1. (noting particular access to
local tribal court system.\textsuperscript{713} Although five of the six states profiled in this article include federally-recognized Indian tribes, the legal needs of those tribes vary greatly, in part because of Public Law 280.\textsuperscript{714}

Finally, good data are tremendous advocacy tools for rural access to justice initiatives. Without detailed data on the location and acuteness of attorney deserts, it is hard to imagine South Dakota legislators’ having funded Project Rural Practice. Charitable funders, too, are looking to create positive change, and rural access-to-justice advocates need data to show them how and where to get a return on their investment.

**B. Tailor Action to Circumstances, Including in Use of Technology**

Once data are gathered regarding the legal needs and overall legal landscape in a particular area, the programmatic, organizational, and funding structures that are created to meet those needs must also be nimble so that solutions are malleable. Sometimes local or regional tailoring is inevitable, such as in states like Georgia and Wisconsin where decentralized court systems may inhibit the implementation of uniform policies and programs.\textsuperscript{715} In other cases, the replication of an initiative in multiple communities is easy, if not always effective, as with self-help mechanisms that use technology.\textsuperscript{716}

Limited assistance initiatives like self-help websites should not be used as a substitute for a lawyer when a lawyer is needed, just as a lawyer need not be engaged when a more limited form of assistance will suffice. Policy makers will need good data to know the difference.\textsuperscript{717} This tension between direct legal representation and self-help measures is reflected in quotes across our state surveys. A Georgia Supreme Court Justice opined, “If we’re looking to expand access to justice, we have to think about access to justice as being more than access to a lawyer.”\textsuperscript{718} At the same time, a Minnesota attorney observed that self-help resources have limits, stating, “You can simplify the formulaic process, but you don’t simplify the law.”\textsuperscript{719} A local judge added, “[t]he issue isn’t getting people to the courts. The issue is getting people lawyers.”\textsuperscript{720}

Both scholars and justice system administrators are studying the role and promise of technology in meeting legal needs, and technological tools would seem to have particular promise in rural areas.
because of their distance-bridging potential. 721 Many states are using technology to provide legal services, as through self-help programs. In Georgia, a law library provides internet and computer access for legal research. 722 In Wisconsin, a legal aid provider started an online legal advice program. 723 Montana courts use video conferencing to better serve rural populations. 724 South Dakota offers an annual “Ask a Lawyer” program where “[p]eople across the state can call toll free for [free] advice on family issues, contracts, wills, real estate and more.” 725

Technology as a means to bring the law closer to rural people will be of little use, however, if digital literacy is low or broadband is absent or limited. 726 Accordingly, states must be careful about investing resources in technology-based solutions without data indicating that intended beneficiaries can meaningfully utilize the services. Pairing new services with digital literacy training or other complementary programming may be a critical supplementary help bridge the gap for some communities.

States must also be careful not to presume they can solve the rural justice crisis merely by connecting rural clients with urban lawyers. Doing so can sacrifice the livelihoods of rural lawyers, when and where they are available or might be enticed to practice. One scholar has observed that the provision of legal services over the internet “seem[s] especially likely to help rural clients connect with urban legal offices.” 727 We believe a better long-term goal is to connect rural clients with local, rural legal offices. After all, some legal services, e.g., court appearances, cannot be provided remotely, and many will be less effective when delivered remotely. 728

One way to connect lawyers to clients is to meet potential clients where they are, both geographically and in terms of the existing structure of their lives. The Tennessee Faith and Justice Alliance (TFJA), which connects members of faith-based groups to volunteer lawyers in the community, is an example of an access to justice measure that is leveraging the particular values and behaviors of the program’s intended beneficiaries in its organizational structure. 729 Another highly-tailored approach might be a medical-legal partnership in a rural area where residents are facing a particular health challenge (e.g., unsafe drinking water, pesticide exposure, or the ill effects of pollution from industrial agriculture) that implicates particular legal issues. To the extent such models


723 See supra Part I.C.3. (explaining Judicare’s Northern Wisconsin Legal Advice Project and its adoption by the state bar).

724 Pruitt & Showman, supra note 18, at 505.


726 See supra Part II.F. (discussing technological barriers faced by rural residents).

727 Prescott, supra note 721, at 2011.

728 Even if some consultations can occur remotely, lawyers must still be available locally to appear in court, particularly in criminal matters. Without local, rural lawyers, counties and municipalities will continue to pay travel expenses for lawyers. See Part I.E.2. (discussing how rural South Dakota counties and municipalities do not have local lawyers and so must pay to bring in outside attorneys for court appointments and to represent government entities). See also Rina Raphael, This RV Full of Lawyers Is Touring Rural America To Save Young Immigrants From Deportation, FAST COMPANY (June 29, 2017), https://www.fastcompany.com/40435629/this-rv-full-of-lawyers-is-touring-rural-america-to-save-young-immigrants-from-deportation (discussing the limitations of remote representation, stating, “But you can’t do [remote representation] unless initially present,” cautions Love, “you need the face time.” And later, “You have to be there [physically] . . . “You have to establish trust in the community.”)

729 See Faith-Based Initiative, supra note ___.
are being used, we know little about their efficacy. Pre- and post-implementation data will be critical to assess the ability of any such measures to improve access.\textsuperscript{730}

Incentives to increase attorney participation in rural legal markets should also be data driven. For instance, because Maine data suggest that the primary reason law graduates do not enter solo practice is due to fear of income instability,\textsuperscript{731} an effective policy intervention there might be an incentive mechanism that guarantees a stable income for a certain number of years upon entering practice in a rural area. That financial incentive could be coupled with other supportive measures to foster a collaborative legal network, including incentives for attorneys to be mentors. What we know about South Dakota’s Rural Attorney Recruitment Program indicates that mentors, assigned to program attorneys based on compatibility rather than location or other rigid categories, are critical to that program’s success.\textsuperscript{732} Likewise, a tailored way of recruiting rural students to law school—under the assumption that those recruits are more likely to return home to practice than a student who has never lived in the area—might be to interact with them through rural-based colleges, a topic we return to in Part III.F.\textsuperscript{733} Lessons could be drawn from military or college recruiters who visit rural high schools, building relationships with trusted leaders who mentor local students.

Regarding tailored funding structures for such initiatives, the cost-sharing aspect of South Dakota’s Rural Attorney Recruitment Program\textsuperscript{734} demonstrates how financial responsibility for an initiative can be apportioned to reflect the intent and beneficiaries of the program.\textsuperscript{735} Yet that model may not be readily transferrable to other states, where the salient price points—for example, the cost of living or law school tuition—are significantly higher.\textsuperscript{736} Moreover, adoption of South Dakota’s model requires that governments and other stakeholders see that the long-term consequences and costs of unmet legal needs far exceed the cost of incentive programs.

Among rural sociologists, it’s often said that if you’ve seen one rural place, you’ve seen one rural place.\textsuperscript{737} The same probably holds true regarding access solutions. We should expect some similarities, but also many differences, regarding what is effective from place to place.

\textit{C. Emphasize the Importance of Resource Networking}

The tailored and place-specific approach to access to justice that we propose will result in a patchwork of legal resources within a given state and across the country, akin to the patchwork of resources described in Wisconsin,\textsuperscript{738} California,\textsuperscript{739} and Georgia.\textsuperscript{740} This patchwork is welcomed. As suggested in the prior section, an assortment of legal resources and interventions reflects opportunities to provide tailored responses to communities’ varied legal landscapes.

\textsuperscript{730} Greiner et al, \textit{supra} note [ ].
\textsuperscript{731} \textit{See supra} Part I.D.3. (providing results from a 2014 survey). South Dakota did not conduct any data-driven research before forming Project Rural Practice or instituting the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program. However, the anecdotal evidence gathered by Chief Justice Gilbertson showed the same reaction from law students—a fear of financial instability impeded rural practice. Gilbertson, \textit{supra} note 469, at 439.
\textsuperscript{732} \textit{See supra} Part I.E.2 (discussing how the program administrator assigns mentors and the effectiveness of the mentorship program).
\textsuperscript{733} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{734} South Dakota provides incentive payments of $13,288 per year for five years, for a total of $66,440. \textit{Supra} note 494. This amount is around $20,000 more than the total tuition an in-state law student would pay attending USD Law. \textit{Supra} note 557. But that amount would not come close to covering three years of tuition, let alone the cost-of-living expenses, of a public law school in California. \textit{Supra} note 185.
\textsuperscript{736} \textit{Supra} Part I.C.
\textsuperscript{737} \textit{Supra} Part I.A.
\textsuperscript{738} \textit{Supra} Part I.B.
The key to the efficacy of any patchwork structure is that the various components be implemented in response to identified legal needs. Further, individual resources must be coordinated such that each resource understands its own role—as well as the roles of others—within the network. In order to achieve meaningful access to justice, a client should be able to enter a functional network of legal resources through any of its entry points and be guided from that initial resource towards other salient resources until the full spectrum of her legal needs are met. Existing resource networks in a given state, e.g., networks of technical assistance providers such as county extension offices or the many campuses of an extensive university system, can potentially provide the scaffolding for rural access to justice initiatives.

Likewise, existing legal resources may be fine-tuned and expanded as data suggest is appropriate in order to better meet the legal needs of a particular community. Consider, for example, the myriad ways in which county law libraries might serve legal needs. Such libraries can serve as a central meeting space for attorneys and clients from outlying areas. Other law libraries may choose to run shuttles to and from neighboring communities (or alternatively, send mobile libraries into those communities) where access to vehicles is known to be low. Libraries can also provide a place for local residents to access online self-help resources. Where data indicate that digital literacy is low among local residents, staff should be trained to answer basic questions about what resources exist and how to navigate them. In order to maximize the impact and efficiency of each of the initiatives within a network, such coordination of resources must begin with collective advocacy at the funding level and be carried through to implementation.

D. Re-define Roles of Legal Aid and Re-think Pro Bono Services and Lawyer Referral

Legal aid plays a major role in addressing the rural access to justice crisis, and it must be funded robustly. For those clients and cases to which legal aid is well-suited, funding restrictions should be re-negotiated—where possible—to ensure that funding is tailored to meet the legal needs of communities served and that it allows for flexibility to achieve maximum impact. Advocates should ask whether future funds can be allocated for formerly restricted activities, such as the creation of self-help resources, toolkits, workshops, and capacity-building (e.g., language classes for attorneys

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741 Indeed, county extension offices may prove key resources for delivering services of all sorts to rural residents because extension agents are typically available in every county. This is an untapped resource connecting universities—and potentially law schools—to rural residents in need. E-mail from Luz Herrera, Prof. of Law, Texas A & M School of Law, to Lisa R. Pruitt, Prof. of Law, Univ. of Calif. Davis (May 13, 2018, 12:54 PM PST) (on file with Harvard Law Library).


743 We discuss other types of networks in Section III.E.

744 See CAL. CODE, BUS. & PROF. CODE § 6300 (West, Westlaw through Ch. 9 of 2018 Reg. Sess.) (“There is in each county of this State a board of law library trustees, which governs the law library established for the county under the provisions of this chapter.”); supra Part I.B.3 (discussing Georgia’s law libraries); supra Part I.C.1.b (noting the existence of county law libraries in Minnesota).

745 See e.g., Part I.B.2 (discussing access to justice issues and the lack of family vehicles in Clay County, Georgia). See also Drisko Zago, supra note 19629, at 46–51 (discussing the potential of rural law libraries); Terry Carter, Self-Help Speeds Up, A.B.A. JOURNAL, Jul. 2001, https://books.google.com/books?id=CB5n6bZ39eEC&pg=PA37&lpg=PA37&dq=aba+journal+ventura+county+california+mobile&source=bl&ots=7UNwBe XD_jtI4z9I&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj184Ti 6ThAhUMrlkKHZP5BrEQ6AEISjAE#v=onepage&q=aba%20journal%20ventura%20county%20california%20mobile&f=false (highlighting California program that brought mobile self-help centers modeled on “bookmobiles”). The idea of bringing the lawyers and legal resources to rural people—as opposed to requiring rural people come to where legal resources are—is reflected in Australian efforts to bridge the rural-urban justice gap. See RRR AUSTRALIANS CONSULTATION PAPER, supra note 19, at 52-55 (surveying various programs, in Australia and elsewhere).

746 See Drisko Zago, supra note 19, at 20-36 (discussing law library self-help centers).
who are willing to practice in a locale with a particular language need\textsuperscript{747}, and for direct representation of formerly unqualified clients or legal needs.\textsuperscript{748} While sweeping changes to eligibility requirements may be impractical at the federal level, state and local governments, bar foundations, charitable organizations, and other funders of legal aid have more flexibility to adjust their criteria in ways that permit legal aid providers to meet rural needs more effectively.

Yet there will always be people and legal problems that do not qualify for legal aid or that are not well-suited for legal aid resources. Moreover, legal aid funding is increasingly unreliable.\textsuperscript{749} Further, rural America does not merely need legal services attorneys; it needs all sorts of attorneys, including—as the South Dakota experience suggests\textsuperscript{750} —attorneys who can respond to the growth of particular industries and contribute to rural economic development. Treating the rural access to justice crisis as merely a legal aid funding crisis does a disservice to rural communities, as it downplays the complexity of legal needs and opportunities for legal practice in rural America. Instead, state access to justice commissions and other advocates and stakeholders should bear in mind that private attorneys are a critical piece of the rural access-to-justice puzzle.

Just as legal aid resources alone cannot meet all rural legal needs, neither can pro bono attorneys, such as those proffered through volunteer lawyer networks do so. Volunteer lawyer networks should only be utilized for clients and cases that are well-served by the type of representation the referral network provides.\textsuperscript{751} For instance, clients who may not have a clear or complete sense of what their legal needs are, such as those who have a number of legal issues at the intersection of various practice areas, may not be well served by a referral to a lawyer who is willing to take the case but whose own practice is highly specialized. Having knowledgeable and effective triage lawyers manage the workflow from client intake through representation can help ensure that clients are getting the legal help they need from lawyers who are well-equipped to counsel them through and across the range of issues raised.

An effective pro bono network must be tailored to meet the various legal needs arising in its target community. Ideally, it will also be equipped to address related non-legal needs (even if by way of referral) that must also be addressed in order to holistically resolve the client’s central issue. For instance, clients who are forming new legal entities often need other kinds of help for their business, such as preparing a business plan or obtaining accounting advice. In attempting to coordinate technical assistance providers to address the full spectrum of needs associated with starting a business, the referral network facilitator can ensure that the lines of communication between the client, the one or more attorneys representing the client, and any other prospective assistance providers serving the client remain open and functional.

Cultural compatibility is also integral to successful client outcomes in referral networks. The highest-paid real estate attorney in town is not a valuable pro bono network attorney if her aggressive lawyering style, though prized by her large corporate clients, sours a friendly relationship between a budding entrepreneur and his landlord-turned-friend. Administrators of referral networks should ensure that client feedback is continually sought and processed, and that participating attorneys are trained and mentored so that the lawyer-client relationships remain effective.

\textsuperscript{747} As only one of many examples of the need for attorneys with second-language skills, Part I.B.2 profiles Echols County, Georgia, where 26 percent of the residents do not speak English at home.

\textsuperscript{748} As demonstrated by the forthcoming article by Lauren Sudeall Lucas and Ruth Richardson, \textit{Unfamiliar Justice: Indigent Criminal Defendants’ Experiences with Civil Legal Needs}, \textit{U.C. Davis L. Rev.} \textit{__} (forthcoming 2019), many individuals engaged with the criminal justice system have little knowledge of or experience with using civil legal services to address a range of problems they experience during the course of their lives. As noted above, current restrictions on LSC funding prevent legal aid providers receiving such funding from providing representation to those who are incarcerated. Without such assistance, individuals released from criminal custody may face additional obstacles as they attempt to reintegrate into society.

\textsuperscript{750} See generally, \textit{supra} Part II.A (discussing lagging legal aid funding).

\textsuperscript{751} See Pruitt & Williams, \textit{supra} note 152.
E. Leverage a Shifting Market to Enhance Incentives for Rural Practice

As important as they are to meeting legal needs, neither legal services organizations nor volunteer attorney referral networks address the current legal market imbalance that has a surfeit of lawyers competing for too few jobs in America’s cities, while many rural areas do without lawyers altogether.752 Our survey of Minnesota and Wisconsin, for example, revealed that, despite plenty of unmet legal needs in the Northland, every law school in those two states has suffered recent declines in enrollment.753 Nationally, less than three-quarters of recent law school graduates find jobs that require bar passage.754 Law schools are facing increasing pressure to produce practice-ready graduates755 and meet job placement benchmarks at a time when many people are questioning the value proposition of a law degree.756

Just as law school tuition has skyrocketed, so has the cost of living in many of our largest cities.757 This is a particular challenge across California’s metropolitan areas, but also in major metros elsewhere, including Atlanta and the Twin Cities.758 As a result, many law school graduates must figure out how to afford life in a city while working at a small or mid-sized firm or—more challenging still—while living on a public interest salary.759

The current legal economy thus invites a shift toward rural practice, as aging small-town practitioners await new attorneys to whom they pass off books of business. States can facilitate this shift by offering financial incentives to lawyers who enter rural practice. States might also offer incentives to rural lawyers who contribute to activities that support other attorneys in rural practice. Examples of such supportive services include formal mentoring arrangements, teaching continuing legal education classes that equip lawyers for rural practice, or participating in regional networks of


753 See Gilyard, supra note 375.


755 The topic of “practice-ready graduates” was the theme of a discussion group at the AALS Annual Meeting in 2018, where the overall meeting theme was access to justice. Professor Pruitt spoke about what is at stake for rural America in producing practice ready graduates at a discussion group titled, “A Unique Approach to Access to Justice: Training Lawyers Ready to Serve,” AALS 2018, San Diego, California (Jan. 5, 2018).


759 NALP’s Public Sector & Public Interest Salary Report Turns Ten, NALP BULLETIN (July 2014), https://www.nalp.org/july14research (“In 2013, the most recent associate salary report available, the median salary for a fifth-year associate ranged from about $100,000 to $200,000 depending on firm size. These figures are double or triple what an attorney with similar experience makes at a public service organization. The $160,000 starting salary at big firms in big cities is beyond what even the most experienced attorneys can reasonably expect at a public sector or public interest organization.”)
attorneys who share the work of rural clients. The latter effectively allow a breadth and depth of experience to be brought to the rural client, far exceeding what any one attorney in the network could provide. The federal government could consider a loan forgiveness mechanism that encourages lawyers to practice in rural areas, akin to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program or other federal programs that provide loan repayment assistance for doctors or teachers who work in under-served areas.

The California General Assembly has also acknowledged the impact that the state’s low bar pass rate has on access-to-justice concerns, including in rural communities. Lowering the bar “cut score” could serve to inject law graduates into rural communities, either because more of those graduates who grew up in rural areas could return as licensed attorneys, or because others who pass the bar might seek opportunities outside oversaturated urban markets. It is telling that a legal incubator initiative at a Cal-accredited law school in the under-served Central Valley failed to get off the ground due to lack of need among the institution’s graduates. Some 86% of that school’s graduates are practicing in the rural or quasi-rural region in which the institution is based, and the school is now developing a course that would function like an incubator in the sense of teaching practice-ready skills, including marketing to and pricing for modest-means clients, to law students rather than law graduates. That law school is now also a participant in a consortium developing a course aimed to prepare law students in the classroom via experiential education for numerous rural practice opportunities on offer in the region. Another rural incubator in northern California failed simply because its host organization, a lawyer-referral service, closed. Perhaps the second incubator, with its waitlist of attorneys and clients, would have succeeded had it been established and funded in a way that fostered its independence. These experiences should be useful lessons learned as states explore the promise of incubators to grow the number of attorneys serving rural communities.

Whether law schools and graduates recognize and respond to these needs and opportunities remains to be seen. Not all lawyers will be willing to take the plunge, but the success of South Dakota’s path-breaking initiative suggests that ambitious and entrepreneurial law graduates are ready to go into rural practice—so long as they are made aware of the opportunity and its benefits, mentorship is available, and the endeavor is financially feasible. In the next section, we discuss the critical role that law schools can play in this regard.

F. Engage Legal Educators to Bridge the Rural-Urban Justice Gap

We believe that law schools are well-positioned to narrow the rural-urban justice gap by reaching—at a nascent stage in their careers—those who must ultimately do that bridge-building work. As one Harvard Law student suggested in a 2016 Harvard Magazine article about the purpose of Harvard Law School:

There are also whole areas [of legal practice] that don’t exist yet. The rural poor need help from lawyers on almost all issues of their lives—family law, property law, basic estate planning—and there’s absolutely no model for providing legal

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763 See supra Part I.A.4 (discussing a 2018 study by the California Judiciary Committee).
764 See supra Part I.A.3 (discussing the failed incubator in Fresno County, California, hosted by San Joaquin College of Law).
765 See supra Part I.A.3 and Part I.A.4 (discussing San Joaquin College of Law’s graduate placement trends).
766 See supra Part I.A.4 (discussing Practice 99 initiative, which trains lawyers to serve low and modest-means clients).
767 See supra Part I.A.3 (discussing Northern California Lawyer Access, a failed incubator in Nevada County, California).
768 See supra Part I.E.2. (noting South Dakota’s Rural Attorney Recruitment Program is a first-in-the-nation approach).
services there. To think that we couldn’t inspire Harvard Law students to at least begin thinking about that seems like a very narrow view of our capacity.\textsuperscript{769} This student implies that the burden of integrating rural people and rural issues into legal education should be borne in proportion to an institution’s clout and resources, and we agree. Deficits in rural-oriented efforts will be more glaring among prestigious institutions because they have the potential to make the greatest impact. The general lack of action to date appears to be due largely to a cultural and geographic mismatch that is simultaneously cause, consequence, and illustration of the current divide between coastal elites and rural America.\textsuperscript{770}

Deficits in institutional creativity and agility are to blame, too. Law schools, like other institutional communities, tend to be self-perpetuating, culturally and otherwise. Because most law schools have gotten into the habit of prioritizing the placement of graduates in high-status jobs such as large law firms, they may overlook rural opportunities that are not only critical to the long-term wellbeing of our nation, but also good for their graduates. Contrast the state of affairs described by the Harvard Law student with what is happening in South Dakota and Maine, where law schools are drawing attention to rural practice and holding it out as a credible and desirable career option. In order to shift the culture of legal education in ways that support rural practice, law schools should consider how rural perspectives and opportunities can permeate every aspect of their mission and operation, from recruitment to the classroom to career services counseling. Building awareness of the rural justice gap should be an aspect of professional development, just as law schools pride themselves on building awareness of the vulnerabilities and needs of other under-served populations.\textsuperscript{772}

Another reason that this agenda-setting work naturally falls to law schools is that it is not well suited to other legal institutions. Law firms and legal aid organizations are busy representing clients. We recognize that state bars, state judiciaries, and state legislatures will need to be part of state-wide policymaking regarding interventions such as recruitment programs—as is happening in South


\textquote{Harvard could do anything it wanted” to try change the balance of jobs in the legal system, [one law student] argues: what if it asked firms to pay for their recruits to do a year of pro bono work? What if it made larger investments in public-interest funding, to pay for legal aid that’s not being funded publicly? She adds: “It’s not just about public defense, and other fields we see, like immigration, that are hungry for lawyers but have no funding.”}

\textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{770} \textit{See generally Pruitt, Rural and Working-Class White Women, supra note [   ]} (discussing the Trump-era cultural divide between coastal elites and middle America); Lisa R. Pruitt, \textit{The Geography of the Class Culture Wars}, 34 \textit{SEATTLE L. REV.} 767 (2011) (illustrating the cultural divide between elites and rural America).

\textsuperscript{771} \textit{Compare} Bolotnikova, \textit{supra} note 769 (indicating no coverage on providing legal issues to the rural poor) \textit{with} Part I.E.3 (discussing how USD Law promotes rural practice from 1L orientation through graduation) and Part I.D.4 (discussing Maine Law’s new student group and rural placement opportunities and their promotion).

\textsuperscript{772} While not applied to rural communities, the projects of Harvard Law School’s Community Enterprise Project (CEP) provide multiple examples of law school-based work that could not easily be undertaken by non-law-school-based legal services providers, for a number of reasons. One, the project work that is undertaken by CEP is by definition not connected to individual clients, and many funders of legal aid require that the funds be used to directly serve clients. Two, the project work is often very cross-disciplinary and research- and writing-intensive, which lends itself to teams of students coordinating with various stakeholders and collaboratively tackling the work over the course of the semester in a way that would be difficult for a full-time practicing attorney with an active caseload. Three, because the clinic is hard-funded, it can choose its projects based on community need rather than at the request of a particular funder. For a sample pool of past CEP projects, see http://clinics.law.harvard.edu/lc/for-clients/community-enterprise-project/. While the focus of CEP’s work is community economic development and transactional law, the possibilities for rural-focused law school clinical work as it might differ from private bar and legal aid work are as extensive and varied as the law school clinics that exist across the country. \textit{See also} Barbara M. Ashwood, \textit{Rural Residents for Responsible Agriculture: Hog CAFOs and Democratic Action in Illinois}, 28 J. OF RURAL SOCIAL SCIENCES 76, 85 (2013) (discussing the role of Washington University School of Law’s Interdisciplinary Environmental Clinic in doing environmental justice advocacy as it helped a rural community to resist a concentrated animal feeding operation in rural Illinois).
Dakota—but law schools appear best equipped to promote rural practice in the first place. Law schools possess a level of human capital, student energy, name recognition, community status, and an inherent motivation to learn, build and develop that lends itself to projects and initiatives beyond the capacities of other institutions. In the sections that follow, we consider changes law schools can make in three related areas: recruitment and admissions, curriculum, and job placement.

1. Recruitment and Admissions

The easiest way to add a lawyer to a particular community is to educate and train a person who hails from that community and wishes to return. This has been one reason for the success of South Dakota’s Project Rural Practice. Yet one manifestation of the cultural mismatch between legal education and rural America is that people who grow up rural are less likely than their urban counterparts to wind up in law school. In contrast, children with family members who are lawyers or who otherwise regularly (and positively) interact with lawyers can more easily see themselves entering the legal profession. Without rural law students, an important population representing economic, geographic, and cultural diversity remains effectively excluded from these institutions and from the very endeavor of legal practice. This deficit will be aggravated as the rural attorney shortage becomes more acute and the number of rural youth who do not know a single lawyer—because there literally is none in her county or region—increases.

But recruitment is only one book-end; the other is job placement. The prevailing approach to law school placement—channeling the relatively few rural residents who do wind up in law schools on to

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774 See supra note 569 (discussing Nebraska’s Rural Law Opportunities Program); see also supra note [25] and accompanying text. See also Trish Mundy, A HECS Rebate? Ways to attract and retain graduate lawyers in rural, regional and remote communities, 35 ALTERNATE L.J. 99 (2010) (finding that prior background in a rural area suggests a great potential for returning to rural practice).


776 In an attempt to counter this trend, at least one state has developed a pipeline program to reach rural, college-bound students. See supra note 569 (discussing Nebraska’s outreach to rural high school students and the incentives to attend law school and return home to practice law). See also Amanda L. Kool & Lisa R. Pruitt, It’s Time to Heed the Call of Rural America, NAT’L L.J. 82 (May 1, 2017); Robin Runge & Christyne J. Vachon, Planting the Seeds and Getting into the Field: The Role of Law Schools in Ensuring Access to Justice in Rural Communities, 59 S.D. L. REV. 616 (2014).

cities for jobs—only serves to exacerbate rural human capital deficits.\footnote{778} As another Harvard Law student commented in that same 2016 *Harvard Magazine* story: 

“If I’m the governor of Arkansas, what does Harvard do for me? It takes my brightest kids and sends them to New York…. The answer is for Harvard to be a good neighbor to our country,” not just to the few coastal cities where the largest firms cluster.\footnote{779}

Reversal of this trend will require not only intentionality; it will require a re-thinking of the definition of success.

2. **Curriculum**

The issue of *who* is in law school is related to the issue of *what* law schools teach. The urban-centricism of substantive laws and law-making\footnote{780} aggravates the disconnect between legal education and rural America, which can further devalue rural experience and rural knowledge.\footnote{781} Without a critical mass of law students—and, consequently, the legal professoriate—who hail from rural places or otherwise have significant connections to them, classroom discussions may lack an awareness of how a given law or the justice system more generally operates in rural communities.\footnote{782} Consider, for example, the dramatically different role that guns play in rural life compared to urban life.\footnote{783} Without rural Americans in the law school classroom, this perspective is unlikely to surface. Thus, broader based notions of diversity that value rural students and their perspectives will enhance all law students’ educational experiences.

A law student’s exposure to “rural” law should not be solely through the study of food law or agricultural law. To do so unhelpfully limits the scope of perceived opportunities, as well as the ways in which rural spatiality and other rural characteristics are legally relevant to a range of issues.\footnote{784}


\footnote{779} Bolotnikova, *supra* note 769.


\footnote{782} See supra note 19 (discussing rural-proofing, a practice used in some nations to assess the impact a law is likely to have in rural places, as a way to avoid urbannormativity). Of course, bringing these students into law school is only the first step. We must then encourage them to speak up, to express their opinions. See generally Samia E. McCall, *Thinking Outside the Race Boxes: A Two-Pronged Approach to Further Diversity and Decrease Bias*, 2018 B.Y.U. Educ. & L. J. 23 (arguing that once a diverse group of students is brought into a law school, more work remains to be done to ensure that all voices are heard and respected).


Rural aspects of every substantive course should be surfaced, starting with, for example, torts (the locality rule) and property law (nuisance, right to farm) in the first-year.\textsuperscript{785} Rural-urban differences can also be noted in upper division courses on the legal regimes that govern the family; taxation; healthcare; the environment, energy, and natural resources; education; and other sectors of the administrative state. Various constitutional issues have enormously differential implications for rural Americans.\textsuperscript{786} American Indian law, poverty law, and other courses in the public interest curriculum provide natural opportunities for exposing students to rural livelihoods and rural difference.\textsuperscript{787}

Additionally, the assumption in legal education that students will eventually focus on one or more narrow practice areas may be a poor fit for lawyers who aim to practice as generalists, a strategy that may well be a practical necessity in rural areas. In order that law students who aspire to rural practice are prepared to pursue that goal,\textsuperscript{788} they should have access to course offerings on General Practice, Law Practice Management, and a variety of skills and clinical opportunities.\textsuperscript{789} To some extent, this work is currently being done by incubators who work with law graduates after the three years of legal education. Such training should become part of what is on offer during law school.

Another curricular consideration is whether and how experiential opportunities such as clinics, externships, and internships expose students to—and validate—rural career trajectories.\textsuperscript{790} Currently, few law schools provide significant or meaningful opportunities for their students to connect with rural America and its denizens. Any connections made are too often one-dimensional and short-lived.\textsuperscript{791}

As law schools begin to take seriously rural prospects and the need to train students to rise to them, opportunities for innovation will abound. Coalitions of law schools could share the task of creating and delivering curriculum to equip would-be rural practitioners.\textsuperscript{792} This would permit law schools to bolster their own offerings through shared investment and effort.\textsuperscript{793} Similarly, partnerships between law schools and rural-based colleges could eventually allow rural students to access legal education without leaving their communities—at least not for the entire three-year stint typically required for a law degree.\textsuperscript{794} Such a program would make it easier for those graduates to establish a...
rural practice quickly, in a place they know. Likewise, reciprocity arrangements with rural-based law schools would allow urban-based students to access curricula and communities not otherwise available to them. Satellite campuses, cross-registration arrangements, and online course delivery could meet future students where they are and educate them in the communities in which they will eventually practice.795

3. Career Services/Placement

In addition to the problem of urban-centric law school culture and curriculum—often exacerbated by the fact that most law schools are located in urban places796—many law schools are unduly narrow in their approach to job placement for their graduates. While institutions such as the University of South Dakota Law School and Maine Law actively promote rural and small-firm practice,797 many other law schools implicitly steer graduates towards large law firms.798 At one point or another, most law students and young lawyers have heard success defined as landing a high-paying, “big law” job.799 Those students inclined toward public interest work, on the other hand, are often steered towards fellowships. Government positions fall somewhere between. On-campus recruitment efforts and job fairs provide students with well-trodden exposure to these common and more familiar opportunities.

Yet the legal market is changing as firms demand practice-ready graduates and emerging legal constructs such as social enterprises800 blur the lines between nonprofit and for-profit legal work. Meanwhile, technology, off-shoring, and shifting legal needs inject uncertainty into the typical classroom-to-workplace path.801 The upside of this uncertainty is that it creates opportunities for those who are entrepreneurial and aim to innovate. Perhaps entrepreneurial students with tech-based or otherwise innovative ideas for disrupting the legal market can be supported and encouraged to apply their ingenuity to addressing the rural access to justice crisis.802 These ideas might include ways for attorneys to practice across vast distances within which an adequate client pool cannot be achieved in

795 Id. See also Mary Dracup and Richard Coverdale, E-Learning Opportunities and challenges for legal education in Rural Victoria, 40 ALTERNATIVE L. J. 127 (2015).
796 See Christopher Chavis, supra note [72] (arguing that “law schools, like lawyers, are distributed in a manner that encourages economically inefficient clustering in urban centers”). See also supra note [77] and accompanying text. During the fall of 2017, a task force was convened to contemplate moving the University of South Dakota School of Law from Vermillion to Sioux Falls, the state’s largest city. The task force recommended the law school stay in Vermillion on the University’s main campus. Megan Raposa, USD Law School Should Offer Classes in Sioux Falls, Task Force Says, ARGUS LEADER (Oct. 6, 2017), https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/education/2018/03/20/more-change-usd-law-school-dean-steps-down/442288002/ [https://perma.cc/2DXL-2PKZ].
797 See also Wandler, Supply and Demand, supra note [19]; Hillary Wandler, Expanding Local Legal Services, supra note [19].
798 Bolotnikova, supra note 769 (indicating that the career path of least resistance at Harvard Law is a job at a large law firms).
801 See, e.g., Elaine Mc Ardle, Greiner, HLS Students Spearhead New Consumer Debt Relief Project, HARV. L. TODAY (Jan. 29, 2014), https://today.law.harvard.edu/greiner-hls-students-spearhead-new-consumer-debt-relief-project/ [https://perma.cc/GC6H-QBB6] (“The project, the largest randomized study ever conducted in the law, is expected to last five or six years, and is designed to find out how and when legal aid is most effective, a kind of triage framework to best deploy limited legal services.”).
any one locale. Perhaps niche, specialized practice opportunities exist in a given rural community—opportunities not on offer in urban environs; a law school may be the best placed institution to connect students to that opportunity.

Likewise, law schools should be creative—and allow students to be creative—in exploring opportunities for rural practice. Perhaps a school’s criteria for loan repayment assistance and fellowships could be adjusted to ensure that low bono practices in underserved areas qualify for these benefits. Job fairs, networking events, and recruitment efforts could be organized by geography rather than by employer to give students interested in rural practice a sense of the legal market in a particular rural region. A succession-planning program for aging lawyers who are looking for new attorneys to whom they might sell their practice, similar to the program in Georgia, should be on offer in every state.

Once rural opportunities are more thoughtfully explored and identified, career counselors should be intentional about promoting them to students. Legal educators should be mindful not to unintentionally perpetuate—or allow others to perpetuate—stereotypes about rural life and rural people, stereotypes that could dissuade students from exploring rural opportunities. Student organizations such as the Finch Society at the University of Maine and UALR-Bowen can also play key roles by connecting rural-minded students within their own law schools, as well as among law schools.

When exposing students to rural opportunities, law schools should be mindful to avoid pigeonholing rural practice as a single type of practice for a certain type of person. Instead, they should begin to see it as any type of legal practice, by any type of person, taking place in a rural setting or serving rural communities. The benefit of such a shift in mindset will clearly inure to students who wish to undertake rural practice. Law schools will also be beneficiaries of such a shift because a broad range of legal practice opportunities increases the likelihood that the school’s graduates will be meaningfully employed after graduation, a metric of great import to legal educators in a world where such data drives law school rankings.

Another way to support would-be rural lawyers is to partner them with rural mentors whose own careers demonstrate positive and viable rural career trajectories. In order to overcome the prevailing “big firm” metric of success, influential professors, administrators, and other thought leaders in legal education must champion the cause of rural lawyering, presenting the prospect of rural practice as an exciting career opportunity. The Chief Justice of South Dakota has been doing this for several years—and it is working.

4. Conclusion

As with solving the access-to-justice crisis itself, no one strategy or program will meet all the needs of law schools aiming to support rural practice and rural justice systems. Rather, innovators in legal education would ideally develop a plethora of interventions. Law schools can then select from among these the best options to serve their particular student body and the communities in which they place their graduates and help launch careers.

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803 See Supra Part B.2 (discussing Georgia’s Succession Planning Pilot Program).
804 See Pruitt et al., Justice in the Hinterlands, supra note 29, at 646.
805 See supra Part I.D.4 (discussing Maine Law’s Finch Society); Wandler, Supply and Demand, supra note [ ], at 252 (reporting on the University of Montana School of Law’s Rural Advocacy League, which organizes a Rural Law week annually).
807 See supra Part I.E.2 and Part I.E.3 (discussing Chief Justice Gilberton’s role in promoting Project Rural Practice, including speaking at 1L orientation each fall at USD Law).
808 Christopher Chavis advocates widespread adoption of the uniform bar exam (UBE) as a means of increasing rural access to justice by making bar licenses more portable across state lines. This approach to bar passage and licensing would allow individuals to more easily take the bar in one state but not remain functionally tied to that state as a result of the lengthy and
Law schools must be careful to ensure that rural engagement is not a paternalistic or voyeuristic one-way street, even when employing technology to bridge distances between an urban campus and far-flung rural residents. Law schools should recognize that meaningful engagement occurs when ideas and information are shared in both directions. In short, legal educators have much to learn about and from rural America. When law schools share that knowledge with their students, when they facilitate and invite discussions of rural issues, livelihoods and people, they expand all students’ awareness and cultural competency. This, in turn, will endow students—who will someday be lawmakers, leaders, and legal educators—with greater knowledge of and empathy for the rural side of the rural-urban divide, regardless of where they ultimately work and live.

The Chief Justice of South Dakota has opined that, when it comes to the rural attorney shortage, “substantial relief will not likely come from what have been described as the ‘First Tier’ Law Schools, but rather from bolstering and partnering with our state’s law school to see that students are aware of this opportunity for a successful rural practice.” Indeed, ninety percent of South Dakota’s licensed attorneys are graduates of that state’s sole law school. California is rich in “First Tier” law schools, but those institutions appear to be doing relatively little to respond to that state’s rural justice deficits. We suggest that California policy makers would be wise to take seriously the promise of California-accredited law schools when it comes to ameliorating the rural lawyer shortage. Yet while we heartily applaud what is happening at the University of South Dakota and appreciate the role played by Cal-accredited institutions in the Golden State, we are unwilling to let “First-Tier” law schools off the hook. All legal educators have the potential to help ameliorate the rural-urban justice gap; all have roles to play.

IV. CONCLUSION

America’s so-called “rural-urban divide” and the issues this apparent binary presents might be more aptly and constructively arranged as a Venn diagram wherein rural populations, socioeconomic challenges, legal needs, and legal resources overlap. One challenge is to identify where the intersections are and then to broaden that shared ground in search of solutions. In doing so, stakeholders must also remain aware of divergences: the ways in which rural and urban are different, but also the variations among rural populations, rural legal needs, and the strategies that are—or could be—employed to meet these.

All stakeholders should recognize that the rural access to justice problem is not a problem only for rural people and communities. Rather, it is a national problem, and solving it will require action by stakeholders along the rural-urban continuum. Every court, every law school, every bar association, every access to justice commission and, yes, every lawyer should help bear this challenge and be part of the solution. For rural and urban are indelibly inter-dependent, and, as Martin Luther
King, Jr., observed half a century ago, “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

When rural people can’t access justice, that’s an injustice to all. Ignoring these pervasive and burgeoning rural justice deficits will only deepen the cultural and economic chasms within our nation.

Seen in another light, the rural access to justice crisis emerges as an opportunity, one by which we might innovate within the legal profession and create new paths to legal practice, develop new legal careers. Rural clients are plentiful, as are rural quality-of-life markers such as open spaces, tight-knit communities, and affordable housing. Many existing rural lawyers are willing mentors for the next generation of rural attorneys, if only so that they might sell their existing practices rather than shuttering for retirement with no one there to take their place. Challenges must be overcome, certainly, including how to ensure a practice is profitable while services are affordable. Yet as the imbalance between law school graduates and available employment remains, and as broadband access opens doors to bridging distances and employment prospects between our cities and our rural areas, rural opportunities become increasingly compelling. In addition to addressing a critical need, economic reasons should compel young lawyers, law schools, governments, and others to invest in rural access to justice.

As we have demonstrated here, determining the legal needs of a particular rural area and devising solutions to meet these needs should be a highly tailored, data-driven endeavor, undertaken by a network of diverse stakeholders united in a commitment to equitable access to justice. We can and must learn from one another as we design strategies to meet the legal needs that rural people and their communities identify. We must also remember that no two rural communities are the same and that solutions must likewise be nuanced and locally-relevant. With this in mind, bolstered by comprehensive data, and with an appreciation for our rural strengths and diversity, we can devise solutions to the rural access to justice crisis that are as varied, unique, and robust as the land across which they must ultimately be deployed.

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816 See supra notes [     ] and accompanying text.

817 See Bronner, supra note 517.