

# Addressing the Rural Practice Shortage



**Larry J. Martin** is the executive director for the State Bar of Wisconsin. Tweet him @LarryJMartinED. View the digital article at [www.wisbar.org/wl](http://www.wisbar.org/wl). [lmartin@wisbar.org](mailto:lmartin@wisbar.org)

**signUp**  
WWW.WISBAR.ORG

## RURAL CLERKSHIP PROGRAM:

Recruitment of Wisconsin and Minnesota law students for the 2025 Rural Clerkship Program is underway. Information was recently emailed to rural Wisconsin employers; employer participation information is due by Nov. 14, 2024. For more information and to participate, contact member engagement manager Kim Burns at the State Bar Center: (608) 250-6181 or [kburns@wisbar.org](mailto:kburns@wisbar.org).

**The State Bar, partnering with the Wisconsin Law Foundation, and through a generous multi-year donation by attorney Kathryn Bullon, is launching the Rural Practice Development Program to connect employers to students who are looking for an opportunity in rural Wisconsin.**

BY LARRY J. MARTIN

The dwindling numbers of attorneys practicing in rural areas of Wisconsin is a crisis that policy makers in our state Capitol must address. It is a fundamental issue of access to justice and can no longer be ignored.

Come January, when a new legislature is seated, the State Bar of Wisconsin will vigorously work to advocate for solutions that meaningfully address this issue. But we can't simply wait for action out of Madison. That is why the State Bar is stepping up with our own initiatives that will show attorneys the benefits of practicing law in rural areas.

First, the State Bar just completed our inaugural summer rural clerkship program, in which first- and second-year law students from Wisconsin and Minnesota law schools applied for a limited-term, full-time paid summer employment opportunity. Sixteen students were hired by seven employers, including one who offered 10 positions across rural Wisconsin. The first year of the program was a huge success. As word of this program spreads, we are receiving more inquiries from employers looking for a

clerk next summer. The State Bar is gearing up to launch the second year of the program, giving all rural employers the ability to participate and connect with students who are looking for an opportunity in rural Wisconsin.

Second, the State Bar, partnering with the Wisconsin Law Foundation, and through a generous multi-year donation by attorney Kathryn Bullon, is launching the Rural Practice Development Program. The goal is to recruit three attorneys in each of the next four years to establish their practice in rural Wisconsin. Each recipient who commits to live and practice law in rural Wisconsin for at least two years would receive a \$5,000 award at the start and another \$5,000 upon completion of a two-year commitment. Eligible recipients include attorneys who open a practice or work full time at a firm, government, or nonprofit entity. Once implemented, Wisconsin could potentially have 12 new attorneys practicing in rural Wisconsin in four years.

Kathryn Bullon is a long-time leader in the State Bar of Wisconsin and our Nonresident Lawyers Division. She loves her home state and her chosen profession and has a strong personal commitment to addressing our state's "legal deserts." Through her generosity, and in her honor, the Wisconsin Law Foundation has established the Kathryn Rasmussen Bullon Fund to Enhance Legal Representation, to be known as the "Bullon Fund." With this endowed fund, we will be able to demonstrate the value and benefits of living and practicing in rural Wisconsin.

Bullon's gift, totaling \$260,000 over four years, will be a game changer in our efforts to directly support and encourage lawyers to practice in the underserved areas and populations of our state. I cannot think of a more impactful legacy. **WL**



**Kathryn M. Bullon, U.W. 1980, operates Deerhaven Consulting Services in Sombra, Ontario, Canada. She is a Fellow of the Wisconsin Law Foundation and a member of the State Bar of Wisconsin's Finance Committee, Nonresident Lawyers Division board, and Senior Lawyers Division.**