

My name is H. Patrick Weir. I have practiced law in North Dakota since September, 1965. I was a lawyer with the Vogel Law Firm in Fargo & Bismarck. I then was appointed a District Judge for the S.W. District and served in that capacity for four years, following which I served as a Surrogate Judge for the district courts upon appointment by the Supreme Court. I am now serving as the Billings County States Attorney

Over the course of my legal career and my service as a judge, I have seen an ever increasing concentration of lawyers in our larger communities. This development has led to a continuing drain on lawyers serving the smaller counties and communities throughout the state. Other than myself, I do not believe there are any licensed lawyers in Billings County and very few, if any, serving in other rural counties in SW North Dakota.

The result of the concentration of lawyers in larger communities means, of course, increased travel time, inconvenience and expense for citizens living in rural areas. An additional loss to those communities not served by lawyers is the loss of pro bono volunteer work usually done by lawyers for local churches, service organizations, fairs, etc.

I do believe the "life style" of rural areas would be attractive to many lawyers. However, the financial burden resulting from loans to complete law school is a real detriment. A lawyer starting a practice is faced with real obstacles, not the least of which is financial. Establishing a practice takes time. Even for a lawyer out of law school for a few years faces a daunting task in opening a new practice.

I therefore fully support the enactment of SB 2233.

Respectfully submitted,

H. Patrick Weir