

UPPER MISSOURI BAR ASSOCIATION
Serving the Legal Profession in Divide, McKenzie, Mountrail & Williams Counties
P.O. Box 2686, Williston, ND 58802-2686

Officers for 2023

Hernando Perez, President
Thomas Jeffrey Corcoran, Secretary-Treasurer

January 12, 2023

Appropriations Committee

Re: HB 1002

Dear Members of the House Appropriations Committee,

My name is Hernando Perez. I am the president of the Upper Missouri Bar Association. Our organization consists of attorneys who live in and practice in Divide, McKenzie, Mountrail and Williams Counties. There are approximately fifty plus (50+) attorneys working in these areas.

Our organization would like to express our support of HB 1002, the judicial branch's budget. Specifically, we urge your support of an increase in judicial salaries. It is very concerning that North Dakota ranks 40th lowest in the nation when it comes to judicial salaries. In order to stay competitive with surrounding states and attract highly qualified attorneys wanting to become judges, judicial salaries need to increase.


Ever since I've been practicing in North Dakota, I have noticed that our judges in these counties are tasked with handling a substantial number of cases with less support and with less pay than judges in other comparable states. In some of our counties the judges do not have enough supporting staff to help with their case load. I have noticed that retention of supporting staff has decreased leaving our judges with more work to do all by themselves. I have seen staff attorney and paralegal positions go unfilled in our judicial district.

In this part of our state, we already have a hard time attracting attorneys that would like to come and practice here. The few attorneys that do decide to move into our community and practice in the northwest part of the state tend to be young new attorneys. They usually go into private practice. It is very rare that an attorney goes from private practice to a judicial position. If salaries are increased, I believe we would have more experienced applicants to fill a judicial position when one does become available. Our judges in our counties are also tasked with

covering multiple counties, that requires extensive traveling. Our judges that sit on the bench in Watford City must travel to Crosby, this is a distance of 230 miles and it take about four hours round trip. We have competent judges that care about our communities and put time and effort into their jobs and as such, need to be compensated appropriately.

Therefore, on behalf of the Upper Missouri Bar Association, I urge you to support a pay increase for the judges and justices of the state of North Dakota. The great work our judges do should be recognized and a salary increase will be a step forward to encourage recruitment and retention of judges into the future. Thank you for your time.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.



Hernando Perez
President, Upper Missouri Bar Association