



North Dakota House of Representatives

STATE CAPITOL
600 EAST BOULEVARD
BISMARCK, ND 58505-0360



Representative Emily O'Brien

District 42

2029 Second Avenue North
Grand Forks, ND 58203-3311

eobrien@ndlegis.gov

COMMITTEES:

Appropriations

Appropriations - Human Resources Division

02/03/2025

House Bill 1600

House Judiciary Committee

Chairman Klemin and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

I am Representative Emily O'Brien, representing District 42 in Grand Forks. House Bill 1600 creates the establishment of an immigration law clinic. I have the privilege to serve on the Workforce Development Advisory Council. Through our work on the Council, we put forth nine recommendations and fourteen endorsements that would help address some of the greatest workforce challenges faced by the state of North Dakota today and the incoming years. I would like to highlight Recommendation #3 which recommends support for opportunities with the Office of Legal Immigration and Recommendation #4 which provides transcript and curriculum translation services to New Americans and Immigrants.

The establishment of an immigration law clinic is important because it provides crucial legal support and resources to individuals navigating the often complex and intimidating immigration system. These clinics typically offer free or low-cost legal assistance, which is especially vital for people who cannot afford private attorneys. Here's why they're so important:

1. **Access to Justice:** Immigration laws can be overwhelming and difficult to understand. Clinics ensure that individuals, regardless of their financial status, can have access to competent legal representation and advice.
2. **Protection of Rights:** People going through the immigration process are often at risk of being unfairly treated or facing unjust deportation. A clinic helps protect their legal rights and advocates for fair treatment.
3. **Educational Resource:** Clinics often educate communities about their rights and legal options. This is crucial, especially in times of political or policy changes, when misinformation or fear can prevent individuals from seeking help.
4. **Real-World Experience for Law Students:** Many immigration law clinics are run by law schools, providing valuable hands-on experience for students. It gives them the opportunity to work on actual cases under supervision, building their skills and understanding of real-world legal practice.
5. **Support for Vulnerable Populations:** Immigrants, particularly those from vulnerable groups like refugees, asylum seekers, or survivors of abuse, may face unique challenges. Clinics are often tailored to help these groups navigate the system with more personalized care.

In short, immigration law clinics help bridge the gap between the legal system and people who need it most, offering vital support at critical moments in their lives.