

Chairman Klemin and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

My name is Britney Haga, I am a resident of North Dakota, District 33, and a graduate of UND Law School, and I am speaking today in opposition, in part, to house bill 1609.

I believe that allowing those who have not gone through the rigorous process of taking the LSATS, and completing the required credits in law school, devalues those who have worked and sacrificed for this degree. It takes away from receiving an education at a law school, and I believe it would give less incentive for those who wish to become licensed legal professionals to attend law school, which would be such a disservice to this profession. We are taught the fundamentals of the law and how to analyze and think like lawyers. If we are no longer required to attend law school to learn such fundamental basics of the law, there is no way to determine that those passing the bar will have a full understanding and are fully capable of being lawyers.

Working in the legal field myself, in a non-lawyer capacity, I've seen firsthand what a struggle it is for our state with the lack of attorneys able to provide legal representation, and the huge need for them, so I understand that this could be a way to help relieve that. However, I believe that we could take this bill as an opportunity to modify it into something that could significantly improve this legal representation drought we are in.

I have taken the bar exam multiple times and have not passed. I have been one point away from passing, and five points away from passing. The process of obtaining your license is grueling, for some more than others. It requires a lot of sacrifice, both personally and financially, and the bar exam is only administered twice a year. As someone who did not pass, I was faced with relying financially on my husband while I studied, and I was unable to keep the legal job I had, because they were expecting me to pass the bar and when I didn't, I could no longer keep my job. The stress of all of that, while also trying to study added to the pressure to pass, as well as not being an excellent test taker, despite the hours and months and years of studying. I grew up only wanting to be an attorney, it was my entire life's goal, and because I couldn't get past the threshold, I wasn't able to be one. I am still working in the legal field here in North Dakota and helping people, but I could help so many more if I had my license right now. So many that desperately need it.

I am not the only one with this story. I have many friends and colleagues who were just under the threshold to pass and have had to seek alternative employment. I personally feel this is a waste of so many that already have the legal education, the training, and the talent to be lawyers, and to help our communities with their legal needs. I have also seen many who were unable to pass the bar here in North Dakota, move to other states or countries to try to obtain their license. This means we have lost out on many capable attorneys to other places, further adding to the disadvantage of lack of legal representation in the state.

That is why I am in support of modifying this bill and in support of the modifications proposed by Lindsey Pouliot. Not to allow those without a law degree to sit for the bar, but to allow those

who have law degrees, and who have already taken the bar exam and failed within five to ten points, to undergo an apprenticeship wherein upon completion they can become licensed to practice law.

I believe this could significantly improve our lawyer shortage, as well as introduce so many capable new legal professionals into our community. It would also not only benefit me but benefit so many I know that would add so much value to our state.

Thank you all for your time.

Britney Haga, JD