

**From:** Shane Goettle <shane@goettlaw.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, February 12, 2025 11:16 AM  
**To:** Klemin, Lawrence R.  
**Subject:** Opposing HB 1609 – Protecting the Integrity of the Legal Profession

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Dear Chairman Klemin,

I am writing to express my **strong opposition** to **House Bill 1609**, which proposes allowing individuals to sit for the North Dakota bar exam without attending law school, including a provision that qualifies state legislators with four years of service to do so. While I appreciate efforts to explore alternative pathways to the legal profession, this bill would **dramatically weaken legal standards** and **compromise the quality of legal representation available to North Dakotans**.

## Legislative Service is Not Legal Training

Legislative experience brings valuable insights into policymaking and governance, but it is simply **not equivalent** to the rigorous preparation required to practice law. Unlike law school graduates, legislators do not receive formal training in:

- **Legal reasoning and case law application** – Reviewing bills is not the same as studying legal precedent, understanding statutory interpretation, or analyzing how laws apply in specific factual scenarios.
- **Trial advocacy and court procedures** – A legislator's role does not require knowledge of litigation strategy, courtroom rules, or client representation.
- **Client counseling and ethical obligations** – Lawyers must adhere to strict professional standards, manage client confidentiality, and provide legal advice with deep understanding of the consequences. Legislative service does not prepare someone for these responsibilities.
- **Legal research, writing, and contracts** – Law school provides structured training in drafting pleadings, contracts, wills, and legal arguments. Legislative service, by contrast, does not require proficiency in these core legal skills.

No other state grants bar exam eligibility simply because someone has served in elected office, and for good reason: **being involved in making laws does not mean one is qualified to practice law**.

## The Risks of Weakening Legal Standards

Beyond the legislative exemption, HB 1609 introduces a **loosely structured apprenticeship model** that lacks the comprehensive education, peer engagement, and professional oversight of a law school environment. The result would be an inconsistent, fragmented path to bar eligibility that risks **lowering the overall competence of new attorneys**.

The legal profession is built on **trust, rigorous training, and ethical responsibility**—all of which are earned through a structured legal education. If this bill passes, it will create a **two-tiered system** where some attorneys enter the profession through **years of dedicated study**, while others bypass that entirely

based on unrelated political service or minimal apprenticeship experience. That is **not a fair or effective way to prepare future attorneys.**

### **A Better Path Forward**

Respect the desire to explore ways to expand access to the legal profession, but **HB 1609 is not the answer.** Rather than undermining legal standards, discussions could focus on:

- Strengthening **scholarship opportunities** for aspiring attorneys from underserved communities.
- Encouraging **law school partnerships** to reduce tuition burdens and improve accessibility.
- Expanding **practical training opportunities** within existing educational frameworks.

I urge you and the House Judiciary Committee to **reject HB 1609** and instead pursue solutions that protect both **the integrity of the legal profession** and **the rights of North Dakota citizens to competent legal representation.** I appreciate your time and consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

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