
SUMMONS

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION FOR THE LEGAL PROFESSIONAL

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WDALA

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hello Members! I hope this newsletter finds you and your family well!

With the new year upon us, let's take a moment and recap our 2025: the connections we continue to foster and grow, the new members we gained, the amazing seminars that we have provided, and the launch of our new website. It is with heartfelt appreciation that I get to continue to lead and be a part of this organization! We continue to do great things!

Your dedication, commitment, and continued collaboration has helped WDALA achieve recognition in the legal field and within our communities. Together, we've demonstrated the power of our collective efforts, and I'm truly excited about what we can accomplish in the year ahead. Let us continue to build upon the foundation we've laid, with a renewed focus on openness, collaboration, and outreach. I'm confident that with your ongoing involvement, we will continue to grow and strengthen our organization.

Please keep an eye out for the upcoming teleseminar in March and information on our Spring and Fall Seminars! Also, please extend a warm welcome to our new members- Reach out to them, invite them to your Region events, or just send them a quick emailed hello!

As always, please let me know what WDALA can do better for you, its members, and its communities? Also, let me know how I can better assist YOU going forward – whether you are interested in specific training sessions, one-on-one discussions, group gatherings, and/or volunteering options; I am here to help in any way possible. Do not hesitate.

I wish you and your loved ones a year filled with health, happiness, and success. Thank you for your unwavering support to our shared vision. I look forward to working alongside each of you!

Anna Jellesed



SAVE ^{THE} DATE

MARCH 4, 2026

LUNCHEON TELESEMINAR

MAY 1, 2026

SPRING SEMINAR

Sleep Inn & Suites

Minot, ND

SEPTEMBER 10–11, 2026

FALL SEMINAR & ANNUAL MEETING

N.D. Heritage Center

Bismarck, ND

Honoring a Career of Service and Integrity: Celebrating Candace Schafer's Retirement

After almost 50 years of dedicated service to the legal profession, Candy has officially retired from the Federal Courthouse! Marking the close of a career defined by integrity, professionalism, and an unwavering commitment to the Federal Courthouse.

Throughout her tenure as Jury Administrator, Candy earned the respect of colleagues, community members, and peers alike. Known for her thoughtfulness, wisdom, and compassion, Candy handled every trial scheduled with care, diligence, and a strong sense of responsibility. Her work not only played a huge part in the Court system but also strengthened trust in the legal system and elevated the standards of the professionalism.

Candy's contributions extend beyond the Federal Courthouse, as Candy has been a mentor and role model to many in WDALA. She generously shared her time and experience, guiding new members with patience and encouragement. Many members credit her with helping to shape their outreach in the community, their continued involvement within WDALA and instilling values that will continue to influence the legal field for years to come. Her legacy is reflected in the culture she helped build—one rooted in collaboration, ethical practice, and service to the community.

As Candy enters retirement, we celebrate not only an impressive career, but also the person behind it. We thank Candy for her years of service and wish her fulfillment, good health, and new adventures in this next chapter! Happy Retirement, Candy!



TREATMENT COURT CHRISTMAS PROJECT 2025

Happy New Year! WDALA has been partnering with Adult Drug Court nka Treatment Court for 15 years! On behalf of WDALA, we are truly grateful for your generous donations. Your support plays a vital role in making a difference for many individuals.

This Christmas we provided gifts and food baskets to four families* (6 adults and 5 children). We also provided a Walmart gift card and boxes of homemade cookies to 35 Treatment Court participants.

On Monday, December 15, Region III held its annual Christmas party. We enjoyed pizza, visiting, wrapping gifts, assorting cookie boxes, and signing cards. A special thank you once again to our President, Anna Jellesed, for single-handedly managing the food boxes for four families!

We took our cookies to court on Tuesday, December 16, which was a change from the normal Friday morning court time. It's always wonderful to see the participants continue to thrive. We are honored to be able to attend and show our support.

Last but not least, we delivered the gifts to families on Thursday, December 18. Which brought another change - the ND Parole and Probation Office moved! They are now located on Expressway and Airport Road. We were not able to get as many pictures as normal, as the families were scheduled to come at the same time versus staggered times, but we still managed to get a few snapshots! One family was not able to make it, but of the three that came, it was delightful to watch everyone, especially the kids, open their gifts with pure joy and excitement.

WDALA is appreciative of everyone that helps keep this partnership running. We owe a huge thanks to the paralegals at Smith Porsborg Law Firm as well as the firm itself for lending us their space once again and for the generous donation. A special thank you to those who assisted in this project by donating/baking/shopping/attending events:

Justice Douglas A. Bahr
Shannon Barth
Justice Daniel J. Crothers
Chief Justice Lisa Fair McEvers
Laurie Guenther
Linda Hagen
Melissa Hamilton
Anna Jellesed
Deyan Junker
Ashley Miller

Penny Miller
Carol Kapsner
Trisha Kinnischtzke
Melissa Klimpel
Melissa Klimpel's sister
Megan Klym
Vicki Kunz
Candy Schafer
Smith Porsborg Law Firm
Justice Jerod E. Tufte

Thank you for trusting me this year to fill some very big shoes and lead such an important project to WDALA. Wishing you a healthy and happy 2026!

Trisha Kinnischtzke





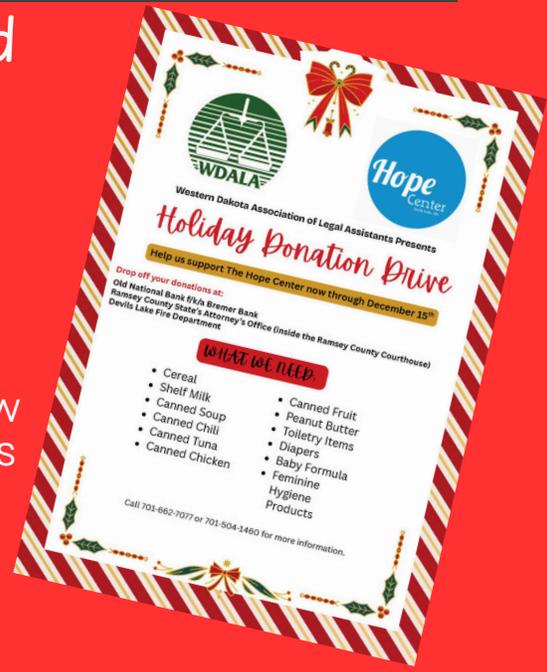
***One family not pictured as they were unable to attend, but their gifts were delivered separately.**



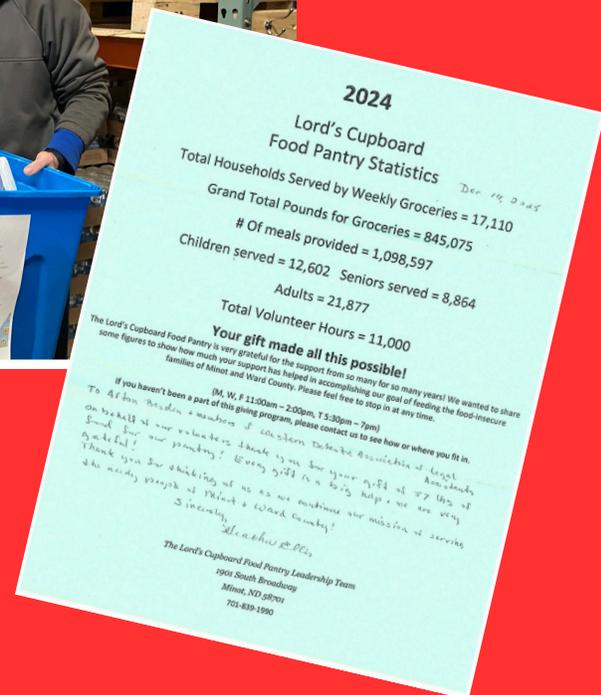
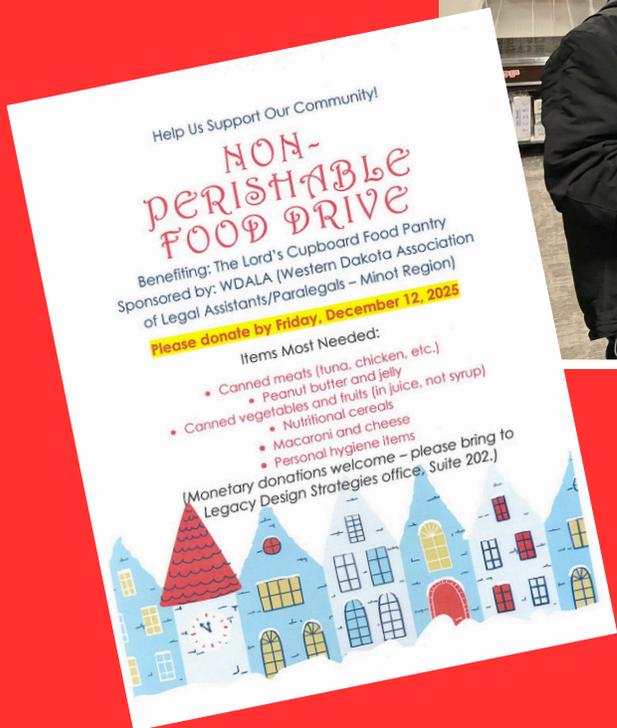
Region II Food Pantry Drive



THE COURTHOUSE IN DEVILS LAKE COLLECTED FOOD ITEMS AND YUNKER LAW COLLECTED TOILETRIES FOR THE LOCAL FOOD PANTRY.



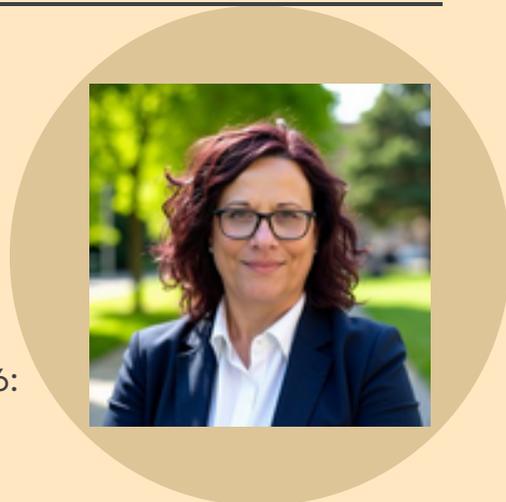
MINOT GATHERED FOOD AND DELIVERED TO A LOCAL FOOD PANTRY.



1st Vice President's Report

Happy New Year!

WDALA is excited to offer learning opportunities in 2026:



- **Luncheon Teleseminar**

Topic: Robert's Rules of Order and Effective Board Governance

Date: March 4, 2026

Presenter: Assistant Attorney General William D. Woodworth

Cost: Free for WDALA members; \$10 for non-members

Watch your email for the brochure and registration details.

- **Spring Seminar**

Date: May 1, 2026

Location: Sleep Inn & Suites, Minot, ND

We welcome topic and speaker suggestions—please share your ideas!

Details will be emailed soon.

- **Fall Seminar & Annual Meeting**

Dates: September 10–11, 2026

Location: N.D. Heritage Center

Mark your calendar and watch for registration information.

I would also like to apologize for not including any photos from the Fall Seminar. While I missed a few speakers, I've included images of our first ever virtual presenter, Lindsay Wilz (who had surgery right before the seminar but refused to cancel on us) as well as Gabrielle Goter and Special Agent Luke Kapella with K9 Lee.

I look forward to connecting with you at upcoming events—whether in person or via Zoom. If you have seminar topic or speaker ideas, please reach out.

Thank you for your continued support and engagement with WDALA. Together, we can make 2026 a year of growth and learning for our legal community.

Melissa Hamilton, ACP



2nd Vice President's Report

Happy New Year! As of this date, our membership stands at 44 members: 37 Active, 1 Associate, 1 Sustaining, and 5 Emeritus.

We did have three new members join us since the last Summons was published. Please welcome Tierra Schiermeister, Miranda Franck, and Molly R. Busch as Active members, all from Region III. Please join me in welcoming Tierra, Miranda, and Molly!

If anyone needs to contact me or has any questions regarding membership, you can email me at tkinnischtzke@ndcourts.gov.



Trisha Kinnischtzke

Treasurer's Report

Greetings WDALA! I hope the new year is treating you well.

Sponsorship letters were mailed out last month and we received fewer responses than previous years, but a couple generous sponsorships nonetheless. I am excited about the opportunities that lay ahead for our group and I'm looking forward to attending our seminars this year. Thank you for your ongoing support and dedication.



Cassy Clarke, CP

The treasurer balance for the Western Dakota Association of Legal Assistants as of January 8, 2026, is \$11,948.51.

NALA Liaison's Report

Happy New Year WDALA! The 2026 NALA Conference is taking place July 16 - 18, 2026 in Denver, Colorado at the Grand Hyatt Denver. The rates for early bird in-person registration are \$629 for NALA Members and \$699 for Nonmembers. Early bird registration ends May 7th. If you register by February 19th, you can receive an additional \$30 off. The conference offers numerous CLE sessions along with networking and socializing opportunities. If you are studying for the CP exam, I highly recommend attending the CP Review courses.

If you are a NALA member, the \$80 member credit can be used toward any education materials offered by NALA. If you need or are interested in CLE's, please take advantage of this opportunity and check out NALA's webinars, and CLE seminars. <https://nala.org/education/>

I just finalized and submitted our annual report to NALA, and I have to say, we are doing great work WDALA. We have some truly amazing members contributing both here in our community and nationally.

If anyone is interested in becoming a member of NALA or obtaining their CP/ACP credential, please feel free to reach out to me with any questions. I can't stress enough how beneficial it can be to your career. May this year bring you much joy and success!



Ashley Miller, ACP

Region II Report



Atton Basden

Our region had a meeting, via Zoom, and we decided for the holidays we would like to do a charitable drive. Locations in Minot and Devils Lake were set up for our local food pantries. Non-perishable food items, and toiletries, were collected and then distributed. Now that the holidays are over, we plan to have another Zoom get together to decide how we want to proceed with the rest of the year. We are excited to make Region plans for 2026.

Andrea Johnson



Region III Report

Hello and Happy New Year! I hope the new year finds you well and you are enjoying this unseasonably warm weather. We have some exciting events to look forward to this spring in WDALA Region III.

The WDALA spring seminar will be held this May in Minot with finalized dates and details to come soon. A big Thank You to the WDALA Education Committee for their continued work to make this another great event. Hope to see you all there either in person or virtually.

Region III lunches will continue the second Tuesday of the month with our next lunch being February 10, 2026, noon at A&B Pizza South. Thank you to those who were able to attend in the past and I look forward to seeing everyone in the months to come. The upcoming dates are as follows:

- February 10th
- March 10th
- April 14th
- May 12th

Region III had a successful Drug Court Christmas providing both gifts and treats to those in the Drug Court program. Special Thank You to those who wrapped gifts and baked treats.

Thank you for the honor of serving as Region III Director.



Megan Klym



Congratulations

Kimberly Perkuhn, CP

Kimberly Perkuhn has successfully completed the Certified Paralegal exams. She is now entitled to use the “CP” (Certified Paralegal) credential.



JUSTICE CROTHERS ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT

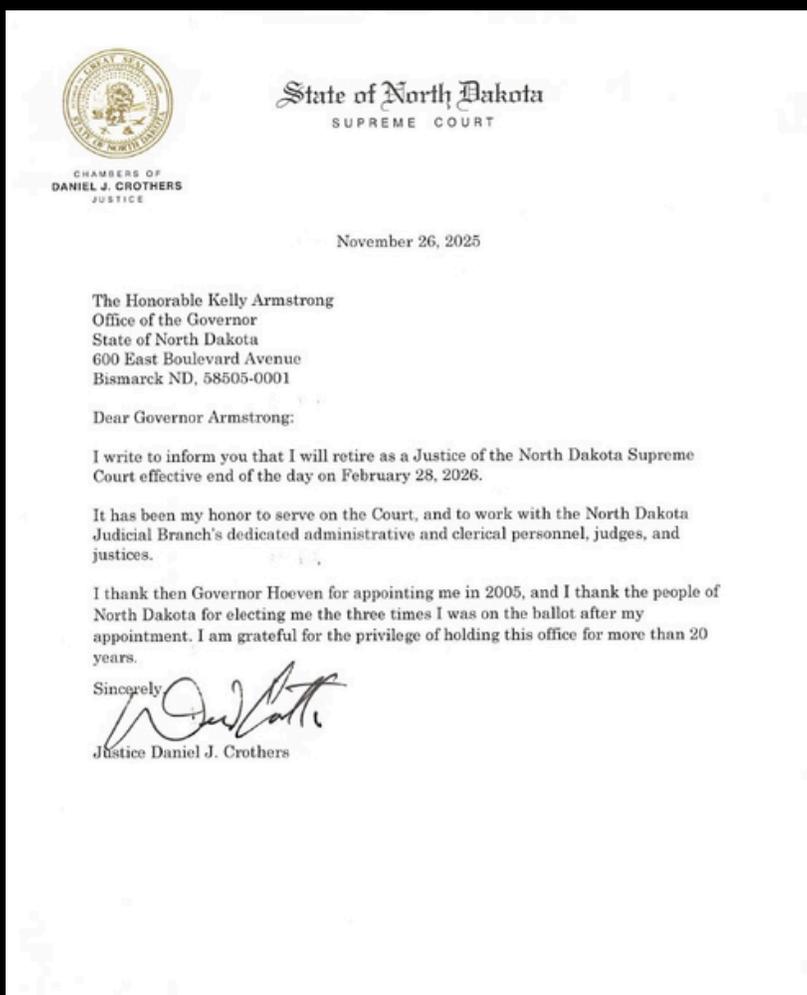


THANK YOU
JUSTICE
CROTHERS FOR
20 YEARS OF
SERVICE.
ENJOY YOUR
RETIREMENT!



Justice Daniel J. Crothers has sent the letter below to the Governor notifying Governor Armstrong of his retirement from the Supreme Court effective February 28, 2026.

After starting his career in public service as an Assistant State's Attorney in Walsh County followed by a career in private practice, Justice Crothers was appointed to the Supreme Court by Governor John Hoeven in 2005. He was then elected to an unexpired term in 2008, and re-elected in both 2012, and 2022.



Meet the new
Supreme Court Justice
Mark Friese



Gov. Kelly Armstrong announced Wednesday, February 18, 2026 the appointment of longtime Fargo attorney Mark Friese to the North Dakota Supreme Court, effective March 9.

Friese succeeds Justice Daniel Crothers, who on Nov. 26 announced his retirement from the Supreme Court effective Feb. 28 after serving on the state's highest court since 2005.

Friese is a shareholder with Vogel Law Firm in Fargo and has practiced primarily criminal defense law for 25 years, as well as civil litigation. Prior to joining the law firm, he clerked for Supreme Court Justice Dale Sandstrom for one year. Before earning his law degree in 2000, Friese served as a Bismarck police officer for five years. He also served 24 years in the North Dakota Army National Guard, retiring as a lieutenant colonel in 2011 after holding numerous positions including platoon leader, executive officer, detachment commander, company commander, assistant staff judge advocate and state judge advocate.

“Mark is a brilliant, fair-minded and well-respected lawyer who has excelled as one of our state’s premier trial attorneys for more than two decades,” Armstrong said. “His deep understanding of the law and broad experience as a police officer, Supreme Court clerk, law school instructor, defense attorney and military lawyer will bring a uniquely informed perspective to the Supreme Court and serve North Dakota citizens well.”

Friese has served on the Supreme Court’s Joint Procedure Committee since 2018 and previously served a three-year term on its Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee. He also chairs the North Dakota Commission on Legal Counsel for Indigents and was admitted as a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers in 2023.

Born in Minot and raised in Bismarck, Friese earned undergraduate degrees in criminal justice and social/behavioral sciences from Bismarck State College and the University of Mary in Bismarck and his law degree from the University of North Dakota School of Law in Grand Forks. He has taught law-related courses at the UND School of Law, North Dakota State University and the University of Mary’s Fargo campus. A member of the State Bar Association since 2000, he has served on the East Central Judicial District Adult Drug Court Advisory Board since 2003 and as the Criminal Justice Act Panel representative for the District North Dakota since 2010.

Friese and his wife, RoxAnne, have three adult children.

Armstrong again expressed his thanks to Crothers for his more than 20 years of service to the Supreme Court.

Crothers’ current 10-year term on the Supreme Court expires in 2032. Because an appointment to the Supreme Court must continue for at least two years under Article VI of the North Dakota Constitution, Friese will serve until the 2028 general election and may run for the remaining four years of the 10-year term that began Jan. 1, 2023.

Judge Ashley Samuelson Investiture

The formal Investiture Ceremony for Judge Ashley Samuelson was held on February 10, 2026 at the Ramsey County Courthouse. Several North Dakota Supreme Court Justices were present as well as federal, district, and tribal judges across Unit 1. Judge Samuelson has served as a staff attorney for the Northeast Judicial District since 2017. Before joining the Court system, she was a special assistant attorney general with the Devils Lake Regional Child Support Unit, representing the State of North Dakota in state and tribal court proceedings. Her earlier experience includes private practice with Vogel Law Firm and a clerkship with former North Dakota Supreme Court Chief Justice Gerald VandeWalle.

A native of Edmore, Judge Samuelson earned her bachelor's degree and law degree from the University of North Dakota. Governor Armstrong appointed Judge Samuelson to fill a judicial vacancy created in the Northeast Judicial District upon the retirement of Judge Donovan Foughty.



By: Judge Samuelson

And what about this new responsibility, being a judge? What did I want everyone to leave here today thinking - about me maybe, but more so our judiciary?

Let's start with this. Being a judge is really hard. Really, really hard.

Chief Justice Fair McEvers touched on the many things a district court judge must do.

District Court judges hear anything from a criminal case, to wills and estates, to a commitment hearing for someone struggling with mental health, to dissolving a business partnership with hundreds of assets, to a divorce involving children, to deciding if a 50-page contract has been breached. All in the same week - sometimes in the same day.

Throw in that we work with the elderly, adults, teenagers AND young children. The abused, the disabled, the vulnerable, individuals with special needs. Defendants and victims of terrible crimes. Defendants who were themselves at some point in their life a victim. Highly educated people and individuals who cannot read or write.

District Court judges see addiction and poverty and, quite frankly, spend a lot of time being part of the most stressful, scary and worst points in people's lives.

So why do it? That's what some of you have to be thinking. It's what everyone in a robe here today contemplated before they sought to join the judiciary.

I can't speak for all of them, but I can tell you what I know I felt. Let it be me.

Let me be the person who shows compassion and treats people with dignity, regardless of their role in my courtroom or their current situation in their life at that point. Let me be the person who tries to make sense of the complex, to find the answers to difficult legal questions AND to find ways to explain those answers to court users who ARE NOT lawyers and judges.

Let me make participants feel heard by an unbiased judiciary, even if they do not agree with the ultimate decision I reach.

Let me make decisions without regard for public reaction, because it is a decision rooted in the law, a decision that administers the law fairly.

Let me grapple with difficult decisions and balances between second chances and accountability, between rehabilitation and keeping the community safe.

Let me work hard, so I am prepared each day. Let me make mistakes and learn from them. Let me learn from more than just mistakes, from fellow judges, clerks, attorneys, court partners, and really anyone in life who have a perspective that is not my own.

Let me act with integrity and transparency. Let me uphold, no...heighten the public trust in our democracy's vital third branch of government, our judiciary.

Let me use my skills and education and knowledge and my own unique approach to life and to people to do all of these hard things to the best of my ability. Let me serve humbly and diligently, never forgetting the immense burden I swear to carry each day.

Because that is the thing about judges. We cannot make life perfect. We can't prevent trauma, conflict, upheaval, violence in people's lives. We can't fix addiction, though I promise you every person here today in a robe wishes we could.

But we can be the ones, we are honored to be the ones, who take on these profound responsibilities to deliver impartial justice and uphold the rule of law and our democracy.

Happy Birthdays

JANUARY

4 Valerie Stammen
17 Deyan Junker

FEBRUARY

16 Laurie Guenther
18 Noni Geer
23 Megan Ryan
27 Holly Radke

MARCH

5 Anna Jellesed
10 Molly R. Busch
25 Andrea Johnson
27 Nicki Wek fka Behm
31 Megan Klym

APRIL

7 Alice Johnson
8 ReBecka Wohl
11 Afton Basden
16 Trisha Kinnischtzke
18 Shannon Barth
27 Melissa Klimpel

MAY

22 Melissa Hamilton
22 James Hagen
25 Tierra Schiermeister

JUNE

14 Carmen G. Dukeman
28 Stephanie Howe
29 Megan Ontis

JULY

2 Becky Kocourek
20 Vicki Kunz
25 Molly Guy

AUGUST

9 Dianne Taix
11 Nathaniel Henjum
18 Tera Skaar
27 Tami Hulm

SEPTEMBER

4 Candace Schafer

OCTOBER

9 Dehan Schwan
15 Lindsey Lewis
22 Madison McPherson

NOVEMBER

18 Erica Norris
22 Michelle Kessler
27 Linda K. Hagen Mathern
30 Miranda Franck

DECEMBER

5 Cassy Clark
11 Brittany Dahl
14 Ashley Miller
19 Hollie Zink
22 Shari L. Erdman
29 Kimberly Perkuhn



Paralegals explaining court filing processes to attorneys.



"I love answering Interrogatories and Requests for Production." said no paralegal ever.



someecards user card

Dance like nobody is watching.



Email like it may one day be found during discovery.

I 'AM A MOM
AND A PARALEGAL
NOTHING SCARES ME

PARALEGAL
(NOUN)

1. A PERSON WHO IS CALLED FOR HELP IN EVERY URGENT SITUATION.
2. SEE ALSO MAGICIAN.

BALANCING THE SCALES: MENTAL WELLNESS IN THE LEGAL WORKPLACE

Working as a paralegal is both intellectually demanding and emotionally complex. Positioned at the intersection of clients, attorneys, courts, and deadlines, paralegals carry significant responsibility in ensuring the legal process runs smoothly. While much attention is often given to legal knowledge and technical skills, the importance of mental health in this profession cannot be overstated. Maintaining strong mental well-being is essential not only for professional performance but also for ethical responsibility, personal resilience, and long-term career sustainability.

Paralegals frequently manage heavy caseloads, tight deadlines, and high-stakes matters. Whether assisting with litigation, drafting documents, organizing discovery, or communicating with distressed clients, the workload can be intense. Chronic stress without proper coping strategies can lead to burnout, anxiety, and decreased concentration. In a field where accuracy and attention to detail are critical, compromised mental health can increase the risk of mistakes—errors that may have serious consequences for clients and attorneys alike.

In addition to workload pressures, paralegals often encounter emotionally challenging subject matter. Cases involving family disputes, criminal allegations, personal injury, or corporate conflict can expose legal professionals to trauma, grief, and conflict on a regular basis. Secondary or vicarious trauma is a real risk in legal environments. Without adequate emotional support and healthy boundaries, prolonged exposure to such stressors can affect both professional judgment and personal well-being.

Mental health is also closely tied to ethical responsibility. Paralegals are bound by professional standards that require confidentiality, competence, and integrity.



Sound mental health supports clear thinking, ethical decision-making, and professional conduct. When overwhelmed or emotionally exhausted, individuals may struggle with communication, patience, or sound judgment—qualities that are vital in legal settings. Taking care of one’s mental health is therefore not a personal luxury but a professional obligation.

Moreover, a healthy mental state enhances productivity and workplace relationships. Law offices depend on teamwork. Paralegals collaborate with attorneys, court personnel, clients, and fellow staff members. Strong mental well-being fosters emotional regulation, empathy, and effective communication. It enables paralegals to manage conflict constructively and maintain professionalism even in high-pressure situations. In contrast, unmanaged stress can strain workplace dynamics and reduce overall efficiency.

Investing in mental health also supports long-term career growth. The legal field is known for demanding hours and competitive environments. Without proactive self-care—such as setting boundaries, seeking mentorship, engaging in regular exercise, or accessing counseling services—burnout can lead talented professionals to leave the field prematurely. Law firms and legal organizations increasingly recognize the importance of mental health initiatives, flexible work policies, and supportive office cultures as key factors in retention and job satisfaction.

Ultimately, mental health is foundational to both personal fulfillment and professional excellence in the paralegal profession. By prioritizing well-being, paralegals strengthen their capacity to serve clients effectively, uphold ethical standards, and sustain meaningful careers. In a profession dedicated to justice and advocacy, caring for one’s mental health is not only essential—it is an integral part of serving the law with competence, compassion, and resilience.





**WESTERN DAKOTA ASSOCIATION OF LEGAL ASSISTANTS
2025-2026**

OFFICERS/EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President Anna Jellesed
 First Vice President Melissa Hamilton, ACP
 Second Vice President Trisha Kinnischitzke
 Secretary Dehan Schwan
 Treasurer Cassy Clark, CP
 Parliamentarian ((Unfilled))
 NALA Liaison Ashley Miller, CP

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Region I Holly Radke, ACP
 Region II Andrea Johnson; Afton Basden, CP
 Region III Megan Klym
 Region IV ((Unfilled))

COMMITTEES

Education Melissa Hamilton, ACP (Chair);
 Andrea Johnson; Melissa Klimpel ACP;
 Ashley Miller, ACP; Kimberly Perkuhn
 Membership Trisha Kinnischitzke (Chair);
 Anna Jellesed;
 Finance/Budget Cassy Clark, CP (Chair)

CLA Chairman..... Ashley Miller, ACP

Nominations/Elections.....Andrea Johnson; Dehan Schwan

Auditing (Fiscal Year 2025)ReBecka Wohl, ACP

Legal Assistant Day..... Ashley Miller, ACP; Melissa Klimpel, ACP

Ethics/Professional Development Melissa Hamilton, ACP

State Bar/NDTLA Liaison Ashley Miller, ACP

Historian Laurie Guenther, ACP

Sponsorship Cassy Clark, CP; Anna Jellested

Student Liaison..... Ashley Miller, ACP

Public Relations..... ((Unfilled)) (*Summons* Editor in Chief);
 Anna Jellested (Facebook & Website)



Thank you to all of
our members! YOU
are what makes
WDALA great!

