
SUMMONS

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION FOR THE LEGAL PROFESSIONAL

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WDALA

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hello Members!

As President of WDALA, I am continually reminded of the incredible value paralegals bring to the legal profession. In a field built upon precision, advocacy, ethics, and service, we stand at the center of meaningful work that impacts individuals, families, businesses, and the communities every single day.

The work of paralegals mainly happens behind the scenes—often unseen by the public, and sometimes underestimated within the profession itself. Yet we know the truth, the legal system could not function effectively without the dedication, knowledge, and skills of paralegals. We are case managers, investigators, communicators, problem-solvers, and trusted professionals who help bring order to complexity. We provide stability in moments of uncertainty and contribute immeasurably to the case and those we represent.

The legal profession continues to evolve. Technology is changing how we work, expectations continue to grow, and demands on paralegals have never been higher. Through it all, we have adapted, learned, and led. We continue to expand our knowledge, strengthen our expertise, and uphold the ethical standards that define our profession.

Our worth cannot be measured solely by billable hours, titles, or recognition. Our worth is reflected in the outcomes we help achieve, the clients we support, and the attorneys and organizations we strengthen. We are not simply support—we are an essential part of the legal profession.

As members of this association, I encourage each of you to recognize your value and continue investing in your professional growth. Advocate for yourselves, support one another, mentor those entering the field, and never underestimate the impact of your contributions. Together, we elevate not only our profession but also the standard of excellence within the legal community. Thank you for the work you do, often quietly and without fanfare. Your dedication matters. Your professionalism matters. And most importantly—your work matters.

Thank you for continuing to participate and be involved in WDALA! I look forward to our continued growth throughout 2026!

Anna Jellesed



SAVE ^{THE} DATE

SEPTEMBER

10–11, 2026

FALL SEMINAR &
ANNUAL MEETING

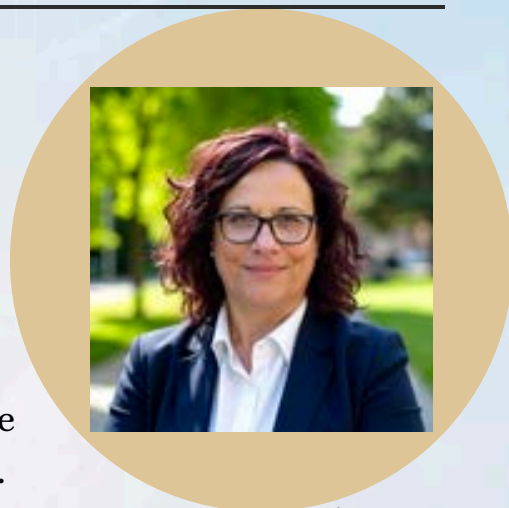
N.D. Heritage Center

Bismarck, ND

1st Vice President's Report

As Chair of the Education Committee, and together with committee members Andrea Johnson, Ashley Miller, CP, Anna Jellesed, Kimberly Perkhuhn, CP, and Melissa Klimpel, ACP, I am pleased to provide an update on our recent and upcoming educational programming.

The luncheon teleseminar and the Spring and Fall Seminars continue to advance our mission by offering continuing education, strengthening professional connections, and promoting the standards, ethics, and recognition of the paralegal profession.



Luncheon Teleseminar Update

The luncheon teleseminar is an important member benefit, providing members with a free and accessible educational opportunity. On March 4, 2026, William Woodworth presented “Robert's Rules of Order and Effective Board Governance.” Attendance totaled 23, including 19 WDALA members and 4 non-members. The program generated \$40 in income and incurred \$70 in expenses, consisting of \$60 for SBAND approval and a \$10 speaker gift. While the event resulted in a modest net loss of \$30, it continues to provide meaningful value as an accessible educational offering for members.

Spring Seminar Update

The Spring Seminar provided a strong opportunity for continuing education and professional engagement for members and attendees. Attendance totaled 20, with 9 attending in person and 11 participating virtually, including WDALA members, non-members, and attorney/support staff combinations. The seminar generated \$1,474 in income and incurred \$880.52 in expenses, resulting in net income of \$594.48. In addition to delivering meaningful educational value, the seminar also produced a positive financial outcome for the association.

CONTINUED

- “Overview of the Office of Guardianship & Conservatorship & Alternatives to Guardianship,” presented by Rachel E. Sinness, Executive Director, Office of Guardianship & Conservatorship
- “Municipal Courts and their Intersection with the Community,” presented by Nick Schmitz, Assistant Minot City Attorney, City of Minot
- “Eviction Basics: Common Pitfalls & Best Practices,” presented by Ariston E. Johnson, Attorney at Law, Johnson & Sundeen
- “Online Child Exploitation in North Dakota and Why We are Bringing K-9’s to the Fight,” presented by Cassidy J. Halseth, Special Agent, ND Bureau of Criminal Investigation

The Spring Seminar remains an important part of our association’s programming and our outreach to members in the northern region of the association. Hosting the seminar in Minot reinforced our commitment to providing relevant legal education in a collaborative and accessible setting.

Fall Seminar Update

Planning for the Fall Seminar is underway, and we look forward to offering another strong educational program for our members. Our focus remains on selecting timely topics, securing knowledgeable speakers, and providing a worthwhile experience for attendees. The Fall Seminar will also provide an important opportunity for members to reconnect, exchange ideas, and continue supporting the advancement of the paralegal profession through association involvement. At this time, Oliver Bromke is scheduled to speak on the prosecution of an unauthorized practice of law case, and John Birmingham is also planned as a speaker. We are additionally reaching out to determine whether a representative from the State Crime Lab may be available to present. If you have ideas for a speaker or topic, please contact me or a member of the Education Committee.

Thank you for your continued support of our association and its educational efforts. I appreciate the dedication of our members, speakers, and volunteers, and I look forward to continuing this work in the months ahead.

Melissa Hamilton, ACP



WDALA'S PARALEGAL OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES

BY: ANNA JELLESED, PRESIDENT

I am always looking for ways to get our Association name and our profession out into the legal community.

I was recently informed that United Tribes Technical College (UTTC) is suspending its Paralegal Studies program at the end of this semester. They will not accept new students into the program but will allow currently enrolled paralegal students to complete their degree. I was asked to continue to be a member of UTTC's Criminal justice advisory committee and I will let you know when the Paralegal Studies program resumes.

We currently don't have anything scheduled with The State Bar Association of North Dakota (SBAND). At the last SBAND Conference Troy Weiler had asked our interest in presenting a teleseminar on the work of Paralegals and/or writing an article for their legal newsletter "The Gavel". If anyone is interested in presenting or writing a piece, please let me know and I can help get it arranged.

I hope to continue to grow WDALA's Outreach and continue to apprise you all of the continued opportunities. If you are interested in our Outreach or know of another avenue to pursue, please let me know as I would love your input!



2nd Vice President's Report

We are thrilled to report that our organization is going strong with 45 members: 38 Active, 1 Associate, 1 Sustaining, and 5 Emeritus!

February 2026 brought the addition of our newest member, Rebekkah Hintz. Please join us in giving a warm welcome to Rebekkah (Region II), who has joined as an Active member. We're so glad to have you with us, Rebekkah!

If you have any questions about membership or would like to get in touch, don't hesitate to reach out at tkinnischtzke@ndcourts.gov.



Trisha Kinnischtzke

Treasurer's Report



Cassy Clarke, CP

As of May 11, 2026, I'm happy to report that the Western Dakota Association of Legal Assistants account balance stands at \$13,069.53. I want to send a big thank you to each of you for your help with our fundraising efforts and your enthusiasm to keep our community thriving!

**NOMINATIONS**

NALA Liaison's Report



Hello WDALA! Board members have submitted our nominations for awards that will be presented at the NALA Conference. Melissa Hamilton has been nominated for the NALA Affiliated Associations Pinnacle Award for her achievements and contributions to the paralegal profession both locally and nationally. I am honored to share that I've been nominated for the NALA Affiliate Award. The Board also submitted out nomination for Juanita "Nita" Serrano as the Affiliated Associations Director.

The 2026 NALA Conference is taking place July 16 - 18, 2026, in Denver, Colorado at the Grand Hyatt. The rate for NALA Members is \$699 through June 24th. The conference offers numerous CLE sessions along with networking and socializing opportunities. Full conference attendees receive complimentary access to the conference recording bundle with every session, totaling 41 CLE hours!

This year there are also two ad-on sessions being offered July 19th for an extra fee. 1) Technology & the Modern Paralegal: Essential Skills for an Evolving Profession; and 2) Building Stronger Affiliated Associations. More information can be found at <https://nala.org/nala-conference-expo/>. If you plan to attend the conference, please reach out to Anna Jellesed or myself so we can coordinate.

If you are studying for the CP exam I recommend attending the CP Review courses at the conference. They were very beneficial for me. If anyone is interested in learning more about the CP/ACP credential, please reach out to me. This credential can jumpstart your career if you are looking for new opportunities.





NALA Liaison's Report Continued



Speaking of opportunities... I am serving on the Lawyer Licensing Task Force that is working on creating more access to justice and filling the gaps where more attorneys are needed in North Dakota. The subcommittee I am involved in is focusing on Legal Paraprofessional Licensure and Non-lawyer Assistance. I've specifically been focusing my time on researching other states across the nation that have implemented programs where paralegals are able to gain limited licensure through their local bar association.

I have presented to the committee about WDALA and NALA's Certified Paralegal (CP) program. Many were surprised with how extensive the exam is and how many paralegals in North Dakota are CP's. I also presented information regarding the different state licensures, focusing especially on Arizona as they have a very successful program. Paralegals who have their limited licensures are able to practice specific areas of law under the supervision of an attorney or on their own. Our subcommittee is onboard with moving forward with getting a solid proposal before the Legislature.

My hope is that down the road, paralegals with the CP credential will be able to apply for limited licensure in North Dakota. This could lift the ceiling for paralegals who feel limited by allowing them to use their knowledge to do more. The public would also benefit from more affordable representation from some of the brightest paralegals in the state. This is a very exciting time for us. I hope to see some of you at the conference in July!

Ashley Miller, ACP



Region II Report



Atton Basden

Several members of Region II attended the WDALA Spring Seminar in Minot on May 1st, and we hope to arrange some get togethers in honor of Paralegal Day in North Dakota at the end of June.

Additionally, Region II congratulates Dehan Schwan, CP on attaining her CP credential. Way to go, Dehan!!



Andrea Johnson

Region III Report

Hello and Happy Summer! As school comes to an end and our weather is finally deciding to be warm, we know summer is truly near. This time of year, is always busy and our WDALA Region III is no exception. We have some exciting events to look forward to in WDALA Region III this summer and should be proud of what was accomplished this spring.

The WDALA spring seminar was held on May 1, 2026, in Minot and was a huge success. The speakers were phenomenal and a great learning experience for us all. A big Thank You to the WDALA Education Committee for their hard work to make it another great event.

On May 5, 2026, WDALA Region III helped celebrate the Treatment Court: 25 Voices 25 Years of Celebration. Thank you to everyone who was able to provide treats and/or attend the celebration.

Region III lunches will be on hold as we approach the summer months and will resume again on Tuesday, September 8, 2026, at A&B Pizza South at noon. Thank you to everyone who has been able to attend these lunches.

Planning has begun for the annual Treatment Court picnic. The picnic will be held on Tuesday, June 16 at 6:00 pm at Sertoma Park. This will be the 15th year WDALA has hosted a picnic for the Bismarck-Mandan Treatment Court participants and their families! We still need additional volunteers to help serve at the picnic and/or bring food. If you want to volunteer to bring food to the picnic, you can find the sign up link at: [WDALA: WDALA - Treatment Court Picnic](#)

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



Megan Klym

25th Anniversary Celebration
South Central Judicial District Treatment Court

The South Central Judicial District Treatment Court, formerly known as Drug Court, celebrated a milestone 25 years with an event held on May 5, 2026, in Bismarck, ND.

The gathering brought together a diverse crowd of current participants, graduates, legal professionals, law enforcement, and supporters to honor 25 years of impact, recovery, and community. The venue space, donated by Tied for Second, provided an inviting backdrop for an afternoon of reflection and storytelling. Several of WDALA's Region III members contributed treats and were able to stay and enjoy the program.

The program featured multiple speakers, including current South Central Judicial District Treatment Court Judge Pamela Nesvig, current and former district court judges, attorneys, parole and probation personnel, and Treatment Court alumni. Speakers shared personal and professional perspectives on the history of Treatment Court and the lives it has transformed over the decades, with a prevailing theme of resilience, growth, and the power of community-based recovery.

Each speaker contributed to a broader narrative of what Treatment Court has meant—not just to the justice system, but to the individuals and families whose lives have been changed by the program. The room reflected a genuine cross-section of the community, a testament to Treatment Court's wide-reaching impact.

The event served as both a celebration of the past 25 years and a reaffirmation of Treatment Court's continued commitment to recovery and second chances!

Since its founding, the court has provided individuals struggling with substance use disorders an opportunity to rebuild their lives through treatment, supervision, and rehabilitation rather than incarceration alone. The celebration included recognition of the hard work required to complete the program, words of encouragement from people who started the program and stories of changed lives from past graduates.

Over the past quarter century, the program has served 561 participants, helping hundreds of individuals address addiction and move toward long-term recovery. Of those participants, 327 have successfully graduated from the program, marking a significant achievement for both the individuals involved and the broader community.

The Adult Treatment Court combines intensive treatment services, regular court appearances, drug testing, and community support to help participants achieve sobriety and reduce repeat offenses. Its success over the last 25 years reflects the dedication of judges, treatment providers, probation officers, law enforcement, and community partners who work together to support recovery and public safety.

As the program celebrates its 25th anniversary, court officials and supporters continue to recognize the positive impact the Bismarck Adult Treatment Court has had on participants, families, and the community as a whole.

Trisha Kinnischtzke



*25th Anniversary Celebration
South Central Judicial District Treatment Court*



ATTORNEY JULIE LAWYER



DOCR SHAE WEICHEL



JUDGE FELAND



JUDGE HASKELL



JUDGE NESVIG



JUDGE LOFGREN

Congratulations Dehan Schwan, CP



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



Persistence Pays Off: My CP Exam Journey

My journey to becoming a Certified Paralegal began shortly after joining WDALA. Once I learned more about the NALA Certified Paralegal (CP) Exam, I decided to go for it.

Earning the CP credential was deeply personal for me. One of my biggest regrets in life has been not finishing college. I qualified to sit for the exam as a Category 3 applicant, which requires a high school diploma or equivalent, five years of paralegal experience, and at least twenty hours of substantive continuing legal education completed within the two years prior to applying for the exam. Taking this exam became a way to challenge myself professionally and earn accreditation without heading back to campus.

From the beginning I knew I would need help preparing. Melissa Hamilton encouraged me to use the Crushendo app to study for the CP Knowledge Exam, and I cannot recommend it enough. The videos were helpful and I appreciated the use of mnemonic devices to simplify and reinforce difficult concepts.

Even with all the preparation, the Knowledge Exam itself came with an unexpected moment of panic. During my remotely proctored exam around question number 50, the program had technical difficulty, and a pop-up box told me it was shutting down in, “5, 4, 3, 2, 1.” The program immediately booted me out of the test and for a moment I thought all my progress had been lost. I about had a heart attack! Thankfully, after logging back in I saw the program had saved my spot and I was able to continue where I left off. Despite the technical scare I managed to pass the Knowledge Exam on my first attempt.

The Skills Exam, however, was a different story.



.....CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

I took my first Skills Exam in July 2025. To prepare I used the Leanne the Lawyer video on YouTube along with the official NALA practice exams. Unfortunately, I did not pass on my first attempt. Like many people do after experiencing disappointment, I gave myself some time to sulk. After about two weeks I had enough and told myself, "Alright Dehan, let's get it together!"

I reached out to Ashley Miller for additional advice and study materials. Ultimately, I purchased the updated Skills Exam video by Leanne the Lawyer available on the NALA website. It was a nominal fee and absolutely worth the investment. I strongly encourage anyone preparing for the Skills Exam to spend the extra money on the course. In addition to the Skills Exam preparation videos, Leanne the Lawyer offers YouTube videos covering spelling, grammar, and paragraph construction, all of which I found extremely helpful.

I took the Skills Exam again in February 2026, and this time I am proud to say that I passed! Special thanks to Melissa Hamilton and Ashley Miller for their help along the way.

Looking back, I would encourage anyone who attempted the CP Exam and did not pass to try again. Failing an exam does not define your abilities or your future success. I would also encourage anyone who has been considering the CP Exam but has not yet taken the leap to go for it. Even if earning the credential does not immediately result in a salary increase or promotion, the knowledge and confidence gained through the process will serve you throughout your career.

For me, becoming a Certified Paralegal was more than passing an exam. It was about perseverance, professional growth, and proving to myself that I could achieve a goal that truly mattered to me.

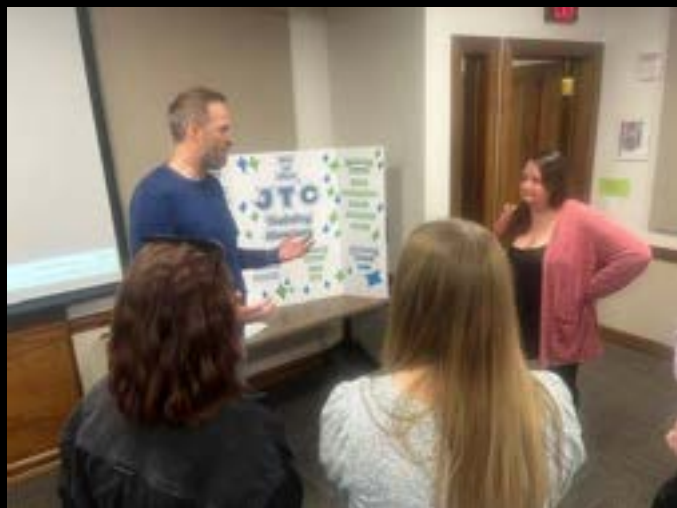


Dehan Schwan, CP



JUVENILE TREATMENT COURT TEAMS GATHERED IN BISMARCK FOR TRAINING.

JJuvenile Treatment Court teams gathered in Bismarck for training. The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges spent a day and a half teaching the teams about best practices, incentives and sanctions, how to engage families and more. The Juvenile Treatment Court teams were able to discuss issues they are currently dealing with, as well as learn what is working in other courts. Treatment Court professionals from New Mexico and Montana joined in to share their experience.



Chief Justice Fair McEvers Delivers Commencement Address

On May 9, 2026, Chief Justice Lisa Fair McEvers delivered the commencement address for the UND School of Law. Seventy-three candidates completed the requirements for the degree of Juris Doctor.

In her remarks, Chief Justice McEvers encouraged graduates to approach the legal profession with integrity, professionalism and a commitment to service. She reflected on the important role attorneys play in their communities and challenged graduates to remain dedicated to lifelong learning, thoughtful advocacy and the pursuit of justice throughout their careers.



Congratulations Class of 2026!



WDALA SPONSORS



The Western Dakota Association of Legal Assistants gratefully acknowledges the following sponsors for their generous support of WDALA throughout 2026.

Olympic Level

**SMITH PORSBORG SCHWEIGERT ARMSTRONG
MOLDENHAUER & SMITH | Bismarck
Dickson Law Office P.C. | Bismarck
Revive Law Group | Mandan**

GOLD LEVEL

**Knoll Leibel, LLP | Bismarck
Lori Hauge | WILLISTON
MULLOY LAW | BISMARCK
KALIL LAW FIRM | WILLISTON**

SILVER LEVEL

**Wheeler Wolf LLP | BISMARCK
VINJE LAW FIRM P.C. | BISMARCK
EMINETH & ASSOCIATES | BISMARCK
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BRONZE LEVEL

Yunker Law P.C. | DEVILS LAKE

Olympic Level (\$500) Gold Level (\$250) Silver Level (\$100) Bronze Level (\$50)

North Dakota Clerks of Court Gather in Bismarck for 2026 Statewide Conference

The Clerk of Court Conference successfully concluded its 2026 annual conference on Thursday, May 14, following two days of professional development and collaboration among court professionals from across North Dakota.

Held at the North Dakota State Capitol in Bismarck on May 13–14, the conference brought together over 70 District Clerks of Court and Municipal Court Clerks for educational sessions focused on strengthening court operations, communication, and emerging technologies within the judicial system.

The conference agenda featured a variety of presentations and roundtable discussions addressing current issues and evolving responsibilities in the courts. Key topics included:

- Public Relations & Engagement in the Court System: Strategies for strengthening public trust and improving communication within the judiciary.
- Meet the Courts – N.D. Court System: Updates and resources from the North Dakota Law Library and Self-Help Center.
- Guardianship & Conservatorship Services: Information on the work and responsibilities of the new North Dakota Office of Guardianship & Conservatorship.
- Municipal Clerks Roundtables: Discussions on administrative rules and appellate procedures for courts of record.
- Information Technology Updates: Insights into ongoing technology initiatives and system improvements impacting court operations statewide.
- Artificial Intelligence in the Courts: Exploration of how generative AI technology may affect court administration and judicial processes in the years ahead.
- Workforce & Leadership Development: Training focused on communication, motivation, and improving workplace effectiveness.

The conference also included the Clerk Association business meeting and networking opportunities for clerks and court staff throughout the state.

The event highlighted the critical role Clerks of Court and their deputies play in ensuring the efficiency, transparency, and accessibility of North Dakota's judicial system. From maintaining official court records to supporting judges, attorneys, and the public, clerks serve as an essential foundation of daily court operations.

As the judicial system continues to adapt to new technologies and increasing public demands, conferences like this provide valuable opportunities for education, collaboration, and innovation among court professionals statewide.

Judge Todd L. Cresap to Retire

North Central Judicial District Judge Todd L. Cresap has announced that he will retire effective July 17, 2026.

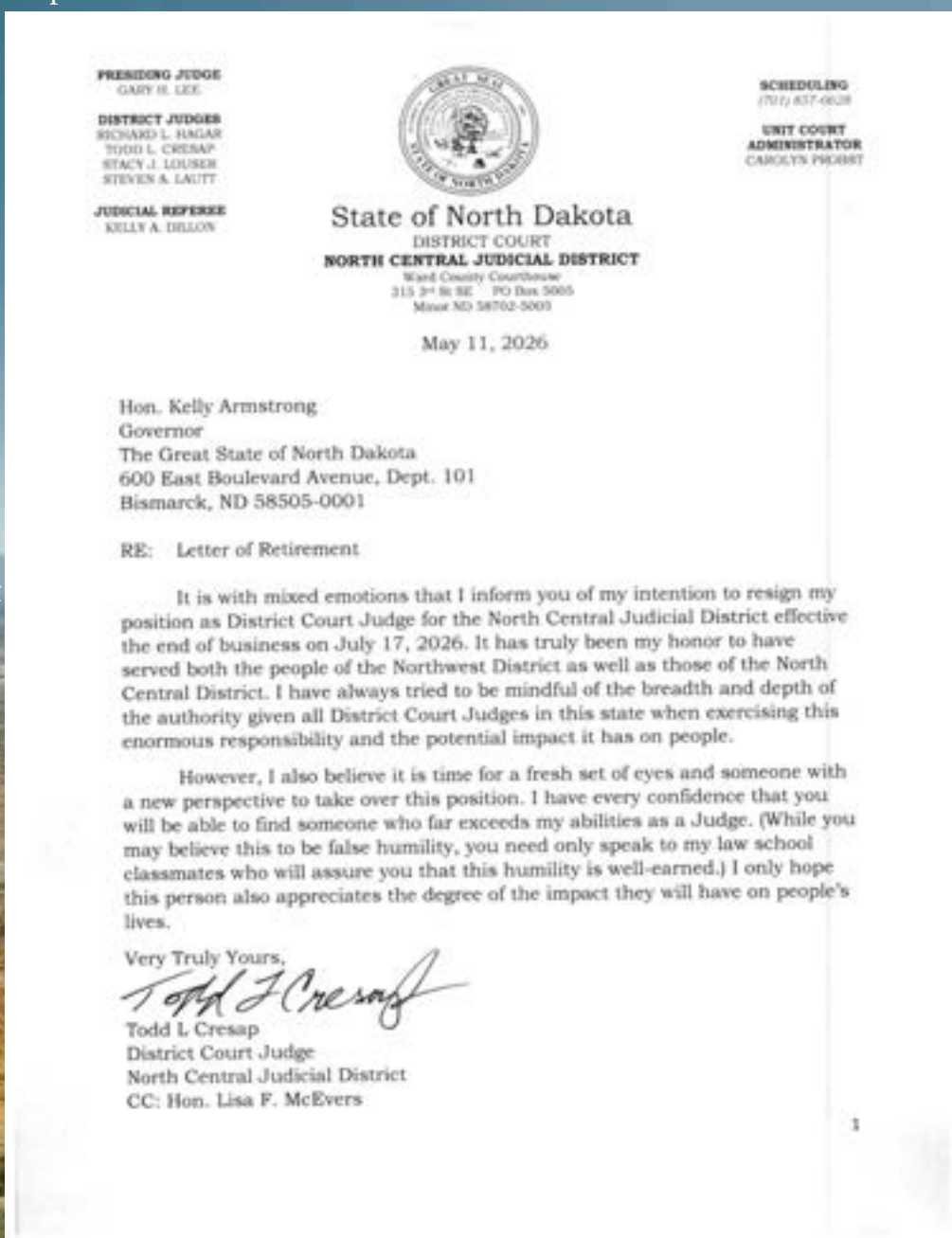
Judge Cresap noted in a letter to Governor Kelly Armstrong that, "It has truly been my honor to have served both the people of the Northwest District as well as those of the North Central District".

Judge Todd L. Cresap was appointed District Court Judge for the North Central Judicial District, Judgeship No. 5 in Minot, North Dakota, by Governor John Hoeven in 2009. He was subsequently elected to the position in 2012 and re-elected in 2016 and 2022.

Born in 1961, Judge Cresap is a native of Valley City. He earned his bachelor's degree from Minot State University in 1983 and received his Juris Doctor from the University of North Dakota School of Law in 1986. He was admitted to the North Dakota Bar on September 26, 1986.

Prior to his appointment to the bench, Judge Cresap practiced law privately in Minot for more than two decades until assuming his judicial duties in 2009.

**THANK YOU
JUDGE
CRESAP!!!**



Court Scams on the Rise

Burleigh County has reported a new scam being sent to North Dakotans.

The scammers have sent an image (see the example below) telling recipients to pay a fine or they will be required to appear before the court.

Scammers can be aggressive and demanding. Remember that state courts or local law enforcement agencies will never call and threaten an individual or demand immediate payment—either over the telephone or money wire service—for fines or for not responding to a traffic citation.

Be aware of any caller demanding immediate payment of alleged court fines or threatening arrest.

If you receive a call demanding payment of a fine:

- Do not give out credit card information or make a payment.
- Do not share any personal information, such as your social security number.
- Report the call to your local law enforcement agency.

STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA
IN THE DISTRICT COURT
OF BURLEIGH COUNTY
TRAFFIC DIVISION

CASE NO.: 49006-TR-273196 ISSUE DATE: April 19, 2024

FINAL ENFORCEMENT NOTICE — COURT-ORDERED COMPLIANCE REQUIRED

OFFICIAL NOTICE OF DEFAULT AND ENFORCEMENT ACTION

Your traffic violation account has been **FORMALLY DECLARED DELINQUENT AND IN DEFAULT** pursuant to applicable provisions of the North Dakota Century Code.

All prior notices, compliance deadlines, and opportunities to resolve this matter voluntarily have been **EXHAUSTED AND TERMINATED**.

THIS MATTER HAS BEEN ESCALATED TO ACTIVE ENFORCEMENT STATUS.

| VIOLATION: | AUTHORITY: | RELATED AUTHORITY: |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to Pay Electronic Toll / Toll Evasion • Parking Violation • Speeding Violation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N.D. Cent. Code § 39-06.1-03 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N.D. Cent. Code § 39-10-01 • N.D. Cent. Code § 39-06.1-03 • and other applicable provisions of the North Dakota Century Code |

MANDATORY COMPLIANCE ORDER

You are hereby required to take **IMMEDIATE AND COMPLETE ACTION** to resolve this matter:

1. Remit **FULL PAYMENT IN TOTAL** of all outstanding fines, penalties, court costs, and applicable enforcement fees, OR
2. Appear before the Court at the scheduled hearing.

FAILURE TO COMPLY WILL RESULT IN THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:

- Entry of a FINAL JUDGMENT
- Assessment of additional court costs
- **SUSPENSION OF DRIVER LICENSE**
- **STATEWIDE** suspension of driving privileges
- Referral to authorized law enforcement agencies
- Issuance of additional enforcement notices
- Permanent adverse credit reporting

FINAL LEGAL NOTICE
NO FURTHER NOTICES WILL BE ISSUED.
THIS MATTER WILL PROCEED WITHOUT ADDITIONAL WARNING.
Failure to act will result in CONTINUED ESCALATION OF ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS until full compliance is verified.

| COURT HEARING INFORMATION | PAYMENT INSTRUCTIONS | SCAN TO PAY |
|--|---|-------------------------|
| Date: May 4, 2024 Time: 9:00 AM Location: Burleigh County District Court Traffic Division 114 E. Theater Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501 | To resolve this matter prior to the hearing date, submit payment through the official court payment system. Failure to complete payment prior to the scheduled hearing may require mandatory court appearance. | Official Payment Portal |

BY ORDER OF THE COURT
Clerk of the Court
Burleigh County District Court
Bismarck, North Dakota

49006-TR-273196

JUSTICE CROTHERS HONORED AT RETIREMENT CELEBRATION

Chief Justice Lisa K. Fair McEvers, Gov. Kelly Armstrong, members of the judiciary, friends and colleagues celebrated Justice Daniel J. Crothers at a February 26 retirement event.

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. He announced his retirement on November 26, 2025 after spending over 20 years on the state Supreme Court.

Justice Crothers noted that the work of the courts could not be done without the help of people behind the scenes, from Clerks of Court to law clerks to his administrative assistants, Pat Walsh (retired) and Sue Hartley.



JUSTICE FRIESE INSTALLED ON SUPREME COURT BENCH



Justice Friese's wife, RoxAnne, assists with the official robing.



Governor Kelly Armstrong speaks of his appointment of Justice Friese to the Supreme Court.



U.S. District Chief Judge Peter D. Welte makes remarks.



Attorney Bruce D. Quick, Esq., spoke of his experiences as a fellow attorney with Justice Friese.



Chief Justice McEvers delivers remarks.



Justice Friese thanked the many people in attendance who had made an impact on his life and legal career, from his mother, wife and children, to colleagues.

NORTH DAKOTA COURT SYSTEM RELEASES 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

The North Dakota Court System has published its 2025 Annual Report, highlighting a year of continued progress in judicial administration, technological advancement, and service to the public.

The report reflects the judiciary's ongoing commitment to its mission: to provide the people, through an independent judiciary, equal access to fair and timely resolution of disputes under law.

Leadership Transition and Vision

The 2025 report marks a significant leadership transition within the state's highest court. Lisa Fair McEvers was elected Chief Justice of the North Dakota Supreme Court, becoming the first woman to hold the position in state history. She succeeded Jon J. Jensen, whose tenure emphasized innovation, responsiveness, and modernization within the courts.

Chief Justice McEvers' message outlines a forward-looking agenda focused on strengthening court security, supporting municipal courts, and continuing improvements in access to justice and court administration.

Key Highlights from 2025

The Annual Report provides a comprehensive overview of court operations, including caseload data, program outcomes, and system initiatives. Notable highlights include:

- 154,399 district court cases filed statewide
- 406 appellate cases filed
- 237 majority opinions issued by the Supreme Court
- 238 jury trials conducted across the state
- 774 mediation cases accepted
- 5,190 juvenile court delinquency referrals

The report also notes that the judicial branch represents just 0.8% of the state's biennium budget, underscoring the system's efficiency in delivering essential public services.

The report details the work of district and juvenile courts, as well as specialized dockets addressing treatment, veterans' issues, and domestic violence. These programs emphasize accountability, rehabilitation, and improved outcomes for individuals and communities.

In addition, court services such as the Legal Self-Help Center and mediation programs continue to expand access for self-represented litigants and underserved populations.

Access the Full Report

The full North Dakota Court System 2025 Annual Report is available on the North Dakota Supreme Court website at <https://www.ndcourts.gov/Media/Default/Court%20Administration/Annual-Report/NDSC-2025-annual-report.pdf>

When opposing counsel is nicer to you than usual



When the document production is out of order with no Bates stamps, labels, or explanation



NORTH DAKOTA SUPREME COURT CONFIRMS PRACTICING LAW WITHOUT A LICENSE IS A STRICT LIABILITY OFFENSE

In *State v. Olson*, 2026 ND 8, the North Dakota Supreme Court affirmed the conviction of Mandy Olson for practicing law without a license, providing important clarification regarding unauthorized practice of law in North Dakota and the requirements for criminal liability under N.D.C.C. § 27-11-01.

The case arose after Olson, who was not licensed to practice law, filed several legal documents on behalf of an incarcerated criminal defendant in Wells County District Court. The filings included a notice of motion, a motion for judgment of acquittal, a declaration, and a certificate of service. In each filing, Olson identified herself as representing the defendant and signed the documents as the defendant's representative.

Following a jury trial, Olson was convicted of practicing law without a license, a Class A misdemeanor. She appealed, raising multiple issues, including alleged violations involving access to jail communications, amendment of the criminal information, and the district court's decision to remove the mens rea element from the jury instructions.

The Supreme Court rejected Olson's procedural and constitutional arguments. The Court found that her motion challenging the State's alleged access to jail communications was untimely and that the district court properly allowed the State to amend the charging document before trial because the amendment did not change the nature of the offense or prejudice Olson's rights.

The most significant aspect of the decision concerns the Court's interpretation of North Dakota's unauthorized practice of law statute. Olson argued that the State should have been required to prove she acted knowingly or willfully when engaging in conduct constituting the practice of law. The district court disagreed and instructed the jury that no culpable mental state was required.

On appeal, the Supreme Court affirmed that ruling, holding that N.D.C.C. § 27-11-01 is a strict liability statute. The Court explained that the statute contains no express mental-state requirement and that the default culpability provisions found in Title 12.1 of the North Dakota Century Code apply only to offenses within that title. Because the Legislature did not include a culpability requirement in § 27-11-01, the State was not required to prove Olson knowingly violated the law.

The decision serves as a significant reminder that individuals who are not licensed attorneys may not represent others in legal proceedings or file legal documents on another person's behalf. The Court's ruling further establishes that a lack of intent or knowledge regarding the prohibition is not a defense to a charge of unauthorized practice of law under North Dakota law.

For attorneys, courts, and self-represented litigants alike, *State v. Olson* reinforces the boundaries between lawful self-representation and the unauthorized practice of law, while confirming that violations of N.D.C.C. § 27-11-01 may result in criminal liability regardless of a defendant's intent.



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