

SENATE FILE NO. SF0033

Wyoming rural attorney recruitment program.

Sponsored by: Joint Judiciary Interim Committee

A BILL

for

1 AN ACT relating to attorneys-at-law; establishing the rural  
 2 attorney recruitment pilot program; specifying eligibility  
 3 requirements for counties and attorneys to participate in  
 4 the program; specifying administration, oversight and  
 5 payment obligations for the program; requiring reports;  
 6 providing a sunset date for the program; authorizing the  
 7 adoption of rules, policies and procedures; providing an  
 8 appropriation; and providing for an effective date.

9

10 *Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Wyoming:*

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12 **Section 1.** W.S. 33-5-201 through 33-5-203 are created  
 13 to read:

14

15

ARTICLE 2

16

RURAL ATTORNEY RECRUITMENT PROGRAM

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2           **33-5-201. Rural attorney recruitment program**  
3 **established; findings; program requirements; county**  
4 **qualifications; annual reports.**

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6           (a) In light of the shortage of attorneys practicing  
7 law in rural Wyoming counties, the legislature finds that  
8 the establishment of a rural attorney recruitment program  
9 constitutes a valid public purpose, of primary benefit to  
10 the citizens of the state of Wyoming.

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12           (b) The Wyoming state bar may establish a rural  
13 attorney recruitment program to assist rural Wyoming  
14 counties in recruiting attorneys to practice law in those  
15 counties.

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17           (c) Each county eligible under this subsection may  
18 apply to the Wyoming state bar to participate in the  
19 program. A county is eligible to participate in the program  
20 if the county:

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22           (i) Has a population of not greater than  
23 twenty-five thousand (25,000);

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2           (ii) Has an average of not greater than one and  
3 one-half (1.5) qualified attorneys in the county for every  
4 one thousand (1,000) residents. As used in this paragraph,  
5 "qualified attorney" means an attorney who provides legal  
6 services to private citizens on a fee basis for an average  
7 of not less than twenty (20) hours per week. "Qualified  
8 attorney" shall not include an attorney who is a full-time  
9 judge, prosecutor, public defender, judicial clerk,  
10 in-house counsel, trust officer and any licensed attorney  
11 who is in retired status or who is not engaged in the  
12 practice of law;

13

14           (iii) Agrees to provide the county share of the  
15 incentive payment required under this article;

16

17           (iv) Is determined to be eligible to participate  
18 in the program by the Wyoming state bar.

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20           (d) Before determining a county's eligibility, the  
21 Wyoming state bar shall conduct an assessment to evaluate  
22 the county's need for an attorney and the county's ability  
23 to sustain and support an attorney. The Wyoming state bar

1 shall maintain a list of counties that have been assessed  
2 and are eligible to participate in the program under this  
3 article. The Wyoming state bar may revise any county  
4 assessment or conduct a new assessment as the Wyoming State  
5 bar deems necessary to reflect any change in a county's  
6 eligibility.

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8 (e) In selecting eligible counties to participate in  
9 the program, the Wyoming state bar shall consider:

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11 (i) The county's demographics;

12

13 (ii) The number of attorneys in the county and  
14 the number of attorneys projected to be practicing in the  
15 county over the next five (5) years;

16

17 (iii) Any recommendations from the district  
18 judges and circuit judges of the county;

19

20 (iv) The county's economic development programs;

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22 (v) The county's geographical location relative  
23 to other counties participating in the program;

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2 (vi) An evaluation of any attorney or applicant  
3 for admission to the state bar seeking to practice in the  
4 county as a program participant, including the attorney's  
5 or applicant's previous or existing ties to the county;

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7 (vii) Any prior participation of the county in  
8 the program;

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10 (viii) Any other factor that the Wyoming state  
11 bar deems necessary.

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13 (f) A participating eligible county may enter into  
14 agreements to assist the county in meeting the county's  
15 obligations for participating in the program.

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17 (g) Not later than October 1, 2024 and each October 1  
18 thereafter that the program is in effect, the Wyoming state  
19 bar shall submit an annual report to the joint judiciary  
20 interim committee on the activities of the program. Each  
21 report shall include information on the number of attorneys  
22 and counties participating in the program, the amount of  
23 incentive payments made to attorneys under the program, the

1 general status of the program and any recommendations for  
2 continuing, modifying or ending the program.

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4 **33-5-202. Rural attorney recruitment program;**  
5 **attorney requirements; incentive payments; termination of**  
6 **program.**

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8 (a) Except as otherwise provided in this subsection,  
9 any attorney licensed to practice law in Wyoming or an  
10 applicant for admission to the Wyoming state bar may apply  
11 to the Wyoming state bar to participate in the rural  
12 attorney recruitment program established under this  
13 article. No attorney or applicant shall participate in the  
14 program if the attorney or applicant has previously  
15 participated in the program or has previously participated  
16 in any other state or federal scholarship, loan repayment  
17 or tuition reimbursement program that obligated the  
18 attorney to provide legal services in an underserved area.

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20 (b) Not more than five (5) attorneys shall  
21 participate in the program established under this article  
22 at any one (1) time.

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1           (c) Subject to available funding and as consideration  
2 for providing legal services in an eligible county, each  
3 attorney approved by the Wyoming state bar to participate  
4 in the program shall be entitled to receive an incentive  
5 payment in five (5) equal annual installments. Each annual  
6 incentive payment shall be paid on or after July 1 of each  
7 year. Each annual incentive payment shall be in an amount  
8 equal to ninety percent (90%) of the University of Wyoming  
9 college of law resident tuition for thirty (30) credit  
10 hours and annual fees as of July 1, 2024.

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12           (d) Subject to available funding, the supreme court  
13 shall make each incentive payment to the participating  
14 attorney. The Wyoming state bar and each participating  
15 county shall remit its share of the incentive payment to  
16 the supreme court in a manner and by a date specified by  
17 the supreme court. The Wyoming state bar shall certify to  
18 the supreme court that a participating attorney has  
19 completed all annual program requirements and that the  
20 participating attorney is entitled to the incentive payment  
21 for the applicable year. The responsibility for incentive  
22 payments under this section shall be as follows:

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1           (i) Fifty percent (50%) of the incentive  
2 payments shall be from funds appropriated to the supreme  
3 court;

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5           (ii) Thirty-five percent (35%) of the incentive  
6 payments shall be provided by each county paying for  
7 attorneys participating in the program in the county;

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9           (iii) Fifteen percent (15%) of the incentive  
10 payments shall be provided by the Wyoming state bar from  
11 nonstate funds.

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13           (e) Subject to available funding for the program,  
14 each attorney participating in the program shall enter into  
15 an agreement with the supreme court, the participating  
16 county and the Wyoming state bar that obligates the  
17 attorney to practice law full-time in the participating  
18 county for not less than five (5) years. As part of the  
19 agreement required under this subsection, each  
20 participating attorney shall agree to reside in the  
21 participating county for the period in which the attorney  
22 practices law in the participating county under the



1 program. No agreement shall be effective until it is filed  
2 with and approved by the Wyoming state bar.

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4 (f) Any attorney who receives an incentive payment  
5 under this article and subsequently breaches the agreement  
6 entered into under subsection (e) of this section shall  
7 repay all funds received under this article pursuant to  
8 terms and conditions established by the supreme court.  
9 Failure to repay funds as required by this subsection shall  
10 subject the attorney to license suspension.

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12 (g) The Wyoming state bar may promulgate any policies  
13 or procedures necessary to implement this article. The  
14 supreme court may promulgate any rules necessary to  
15 implement this article.

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17 (h) The program established under this article shall  
18 cease on June 30, 2029, provided that attorneys  
19 participating in the program as of June 30, 2029 shall  
20 complete their obligation and receive payments as  
21 authorized by this article.

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23 **33-5-203. Sunset.**

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2 (a) W.S. 33-5-201 and 33-5-202 are repealed effective  
3 July 1, 2029.

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5 (b) Notwithstanding subsection (a) of this section,  
6 attorneys participating in the rural attorney pilot program  
7 authorized in W.S. 33-5-201 and 33-5-202 shall complete the  
8 requirements of the program and shall be entitled to the  
9 authorized payments in accordance with W.S. 33-5-201 and  
10 33-5-202 as provided on June 30, 2029.

11

12 **Section 2.** There is appropriated one hundred  
13 ninety-seven thousand three hundred seventy-five dollars  
14 (\$197,375.00) from the general fund to the supreme court  
15 for the period beginning with the effective date of this  
16 act and ending June 30, 2029 to be expended only for  
17 purposes of providing incentive payments for the rural  
18 attorney recruitment program established under this act.  
19 This appropriation shall not be transferred or expended for  
20 any other purpose. Notwithstanding W.S. 9-2-1008,  
21 9-2-1012(e) and 9-4-207, this appropriation shall not  
22 revert until June 30, 2029.

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1           **Section 3.** This act is effective July 1, 2024.

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(END)