



Administrative Office of the Courts

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Law students to serve as summer externs for judges in rural New Mexico

SANTA FE – A dozen law students from the University of New Mexico will gain hands-on legal experience in state district courts this summer through a program to promote access to justice in rural areas.

The second- and third-year law students will serve as judicial externs under the supervision of judges in seven judicial districts encompassing more than half of New Mexico’s counties. The externs will perform legal research and writing and observe court proceedings during the 10-week program. Mentor judges also will help externs foster connections to local legal and civic leaders.

“The goal is to expose law students to communities where they can build professional relationships that make them want to return to rural New Mexico to practice law after their graduation and serve the people of our state,” said Chief Justice Julie J. Vargas.

Externs receive compensation plus a \$5,000 stipend when they successfully complete the program, and are eligible for tuition reimbursement up to \$1,800 and a housing stipend up to \$4,000.

The extern program is one component of the [Rural Justice Initiative](#) to help bring more practicing attorneys to areas of New Mexico in need of legal services. Most of the state’s lawyers practice in the Albuquerque, Las Cruces and Santa Fe urban centers along the Rio Grande Corridor. Two-thirds of New Mexico’s counties have fewer than one lawyer for each 1,000 residents. Four counties have no resident practicing attorneys at all.

“Legal deserts exist throughout New Mexico because there are few attorneys available to help people in many counties,” said Ninth Judicial District Chief Judge Donna Mowrer, who led the committee that recommended establishing the Rural Justice Initiative. “The gap in access to justice can result in serious real-life consequences for New Mexicans struggling to deal with legal disputes such as child support and custody, consumer debt lawsuits, or the potential loss of housing.”

The judicial externs will begin their assignments in late May and continue through July. Courts in the Fourth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth and Eleventh [Judicial Districts](#) will each have two externs. The Sixth and Twelfth Judicial Districts will each have one extern.

The Legislature provided funding for the Rural Justice Initiative in 2023 through an appropriation, establishing judicial law clerk positions for law school graduates to work with judges in rural areas, and in 2024 expanded the program to include law students.

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Students from the University of New Mexico School of Law will serve as rural justice externs in state courts this summer. From left to right, with the judicial district where they will be based: Bradley "Liam" William Burnside, Seventh Judicial District; Loren Vigil, Eleventh Judicial District; Andres Grano, Fourth Judicial District; Darren Malanik, Eighth Judicial District; A. Rafael Romero-Salas, Sixth Judicial District; Andrew Kessel, Eleventh Judicial District; Alyssa Cruz, Ninth Judicial District; Jasmine Jaramillo, Fourth Judicial District; Glenna Leffler, Seventh Judicial District; Stephanie Zamora, Ninth Judicial District; and Jeffrey "Buddy" Wren, Eighth Judicial District. Not pictured is Natalie Burk, who will be in the Twelfth Judicial District. Photo courtesy of the Administrative Office of the Courts.