

RE: 131st Maine Legislature First Regular Session-2023

Legislative Document No. 1352: An Act to Remove Barriers to Becoming a Lawyer

Dear Judiciary Committee,

My name is Donnalee White and I was born and raised in Washington County, one of the poorest counties in the State of Maine with a per Capita Income of about \$19k per year. I chose to move to Penobscot County to pursue my undergraduate degree in Criminal Justice in 2008 and then moved to Mid-coast Maine where I have called home for about 6 years now.

I knew my whole life that I wanted to serve the people of Maine. I always felt a sort of responsibility to contribute to my community the way my father as a Maine State Trooper and my mother, a local emergency room nurse, did.

Upon approaching graduation with my Bachelor's degree and whilst considering my options for Grad school, I realized that soon after I graduated I needed to pay a monthly payment for my student loans. When I contacted my Lender, I PANICKED, and ultimately decided I couldn't afford another degree. This was a very tough, but responsible choice.

So many of my colleagues who went to private schools for their undergraduate, or continued their education for a Master's or Juris Doctorate graduated with payments as large as a monthly Mortgage payment OR MORE, and continue to struggle to pay their monthly debts. Instead of pursuing a higher degree, I started work immediately in the field of law, so that my debt to income ratio was reasonable for the job market in my area.

Maine only has one law school that offers the J.D Program. Not only is it extremely expensive (\$70K for three years tuition PLUS another \$52K in approximate room, board, books, taxes and fees), but it does not offer virtual capabilities, and only holds classes during day-time hours in person. I have worked a full-time job since I was 18 years old, and the thought of having to set my current income aside and not be able to pay my bills in order to pursue a full-time law degree is just not something a lot of people can do.

I have worked for a local law firm for 5 years now as a Paralegal. We have been advertising for an associate attorney position in our area for three years now without success.

If these rules were amended, with the right amount of supervision and self-study, we could have more Representation FOR Mainers BY Mainers. Mainers who have lived here their whole lives and plan to for the rest of their lives. The field of law, along with many other fields, are searching out of state to hire for their businesses because so many people need access to legal services with not enough attorneys working in-state or otherwise. Maine needs access to professional licensing without crippling debt. With the increase in the cost of living, there is a hard chance of any full-time working adult to be able to take on this type of debt repayment with an average starting salary of about \$61K per year as an associate attorney in Maine.

It is because of these reasons and with great hope that I write to your committee to *urge you* to consider voting in favor of this amendment. Thank you for your time in reading this.

Donnalee White, Rockport, Maine

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LD 1352

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