



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Representative David Boyer

Presenting L.D. 1352 An Act to Remove Barriers to Becoming a Lawyer Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and distinguished members of the Committee on Judiciary, my name is Representative David Boyer and I am proud to present L.D. 1352, An Act to Remove Barriers to Becoming a Lawyer.

L.D. 1352 would offer an alternative path for Mainers that want to become lawyers. My legislation would remove the requirement to complete law school before taking the Maine Bar exam. It would not remove the requirement to pass the Maine Bar exam to become an attorney.

As members of this committee well know, Maine is facing a shortage of lawyers, especially ones in rural communities. We are failing to provide adequate representation to the people that need it most.

The State of the Judiciary was sobering. State courts estimate that backlogs of cases won't even begin to be addressed until 2028. Mainers have a constitutional right to a speedy trial, and unfortunately, for many, that right does not exist. Many of whom are languishing in jail waiting for trial.

Since introducing this legislation, folks from across Maine have reached out in support of the bill. I spoke with a woman who has been a paralegal for over 5 years and would love the opportunity to become a lawyer. However, law school is not available virtually, and requires at least 3 days a week in Portland. **These requirements rule out hundreds, if not thousands of Mainers who live too far from UMaine Law in Portland.**

According to my bill, an individual can work under a supervising attorney for two years to become eligible to take the bar. There are guardrails and report backs due to ensure the supervising attorney is doing a satisfactory job.

If we have decided that the Maine Bar exam is how we measure a potential lawyer's competency, it should not matter if that person went to law school or studied as an apprentice.

We should not lower the bar to becoming a lawyer, just the barriers.

This committee is tackling the issues that the Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services is experiencing, and my bill is another tool to make sure that the Mainers who need representation the most- receive it.

Perhaps, we could find more lawyers to work for \$100/hour if they weren't burdened with crushing student loan debt!

This isn't a new idea either. Our 16th President, Abraham Lincoln skipped law school, taught himself law and at the age of 25 obtained his law license.

If Maine made this change, we wouldn't be alone. States like Vermont, California, Washington and Virginia, all allow people to take the bar exam without a law school degree.

I appreciate the committee's time and consideration today. Thank you.