

# Rural Practice

The newsletter of the Illinois State Bar Association's Section on Rural Practice

## Rural Law Practice in the News

BY SAM ELLIS & CARI BRETT RINCKER

### Judicial branch targets rural access to justice through new grant funding

In early 2026, the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice ("ATJ Commission") took a significant step toward addressing rural legal deserts by launching the Reducing Barriers to Meaningful Participation in Court Grant for the 2026–2027 grant cycle. The program explicitly prioritizes projects serving legal deserts, including rural and downstate counties where access to private attorneys and legal aid services remains limited.<sup>1</sup>

Eligible projects include remote court appearance programs for rural counties, community-based legal clinics, limited-scope representation initiatives, and legal advice hotlines designed to reduce

geographic and economic barriers to court access.<sup>2</sup> Grants run from May 1, 2026 through April 30, 2027, and are funded entirely through attorney registration fees and pro hac vice fees rather than general tax revenue.<sup>3</sup>

For rural practitioners, the program signals a shift in judicial strategy toward supporting localized, partnership-driven solutions that supplement existing legal services rather than relying solely on traditional recruitment of private attorneys.

### ARDC updates attorney registration to better map rural shortages

Also in March 2026, the Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission

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On April 9, 2026, Rural Practice Section Council Chair Angel Wawrzynek spoke with University of Illinois College of Law students over lunch about opportunities in the Rural Practice Fellowship Program.

## Rural Law Practice

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(“ARDC”) announced changes to the 2026 Illinois attorney registration process designed to more accurately capture where attorneys practice and whether they are available for private representation.<sup>4</sup> The updated registration questions are intended to address longstanding data gaps that have understated the severity of rural attorney shortages across Illinois.

Recent ARDC and Illinois Supreme Court reporting has highlighted counties, particularly in southern and southeastern Illinois, with only one resident attorney, and in some cases none.<sup>5</sup> By improving data collection, the ARDC aims to provide policymakers and judicial stakeholders with clearer insight into where legal deserts exist and how severe they are, laying the groundwork for future funding, incentive programs, or regulatory reforms.

For rural firms, improved data may help drive targeted relief efforts and strengthen the case for additional judicial or legislative support.

## Continued development of Illinois Community Justice Worker Program

In parallel with these funding and data initiatives, the Illinois Supreme Court continues development of its Community Justice Worker Program, an access-to-justice model that would permit trained non-lawyer advocates to provide limited legal assistance under attorney supervision in areas of high unmet legal need.<sup>6</sup>

While approved in concept in late 2025, program development continued into 2026, with the Supreme Court’s Executive Committee expected to submit final recommendations by October 1, 2026.<sup>7</sup> Court leadership has repeatedly emphasized that rural and downstate communities, where attorney shortages are most acute, are a central focus of the program’s design.

Although some rural practitioners have expressed concern about non-lawyer involvement in legal service delivery,



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the Court has framed the initiative as a supplement to existing legal services, not a replacement for rural attorneys, particularly in areas such as housing, family law, and basic civil matters.

### Kansas expands pipeline-based incentives for rural practice

In March 2026, Kansas enacted the Attorney Training for Rural Kansas Act, a targeted response to longstanding attorney shortages in rural communities. The legislation, House Bill 2595, establishes two complementary incentive programs designed to attract both law students and practicing attorneys to rural Kansas through financial support tied to service commitments. The Act reflects a shift away from short-term recruitment efforts toward a pipeline-based model intended to promote long-term retention and community integration.<sup>8</sup>

Under the law, eligible law students at the University of Kansas School of Law and

Washburn University School of Law may receive annual stipends of up to \$3,000 to offset tuition and related educational expenses. In exchange, recipients must begin practicing law in a qualifying rural county within ninety days of bar admission and commit to one year of rural practice for each year of assistance received. The statute defines “rural” as any Kansas county outside the state’s most populous metropolitan areas, reflecting legislative findings that while more than forty percent of Kansans live in rural areas, only about twenty percent of the state’s attorneys practice there.<sup>9</sup>

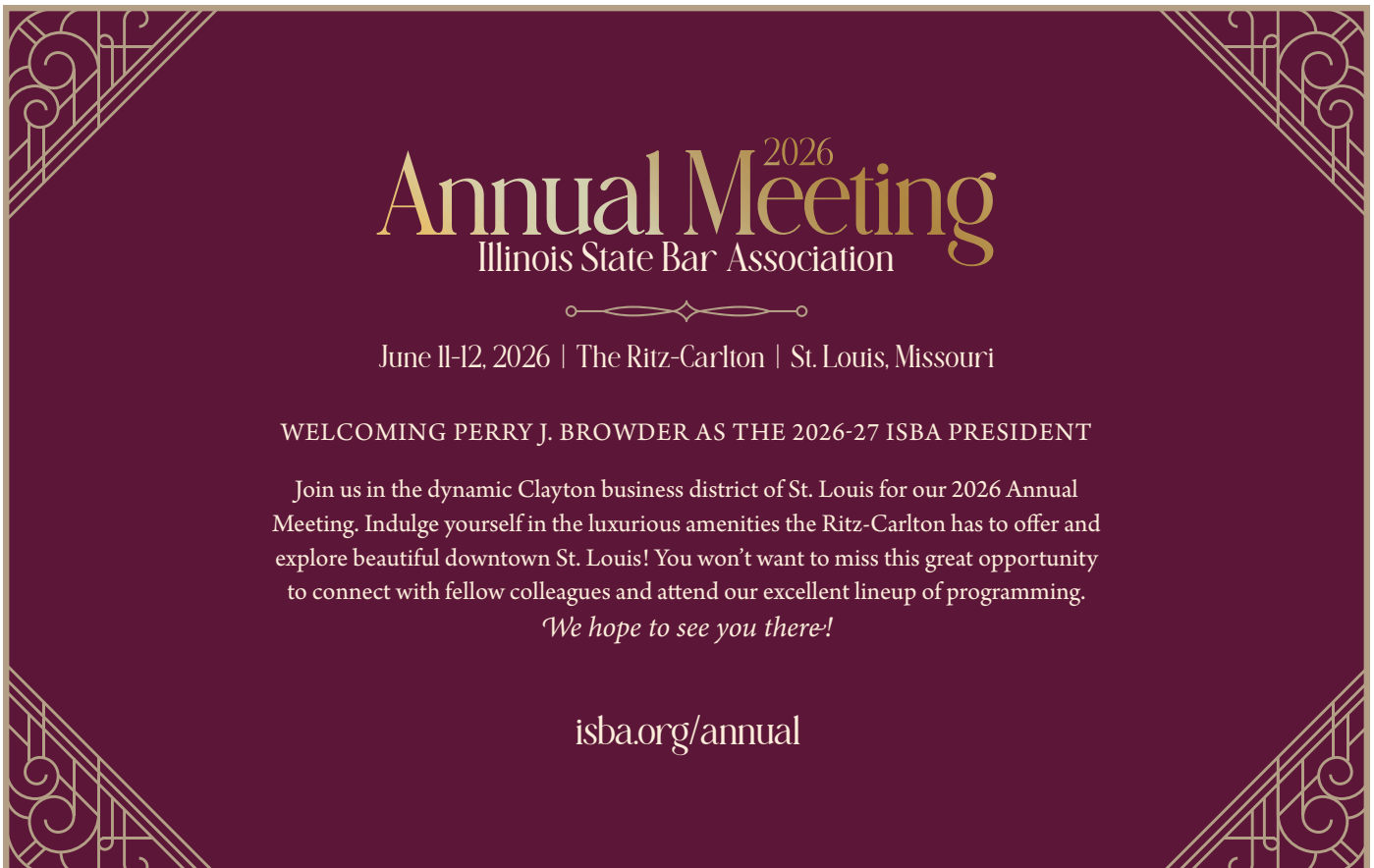
The Act also authorizes student loan repayment assistance of up to \$100,000 for licensed attorneys practicing in rural Kansas, capped at \$20,000 per year for a maximum of five years. Administration of the program was ultimately assigned to the Kansas Department of Commerce following legislative amendments that removed direct judicial oversight.

Supporters, including the Kansas Bar Association, have emphasized that reducing educational debt is critical to stabilizing succession planning in small-town firms and sustaining private rural practice over the long term.<sup>10</sup>

### Mississippi proposes statewide Rural Attorney Program

In the 2026 legislative session, Mississippi lawmakers introduced Senate Bill 2687, titled the Mississippi Rural Attorney Program Act, proposing the creation of a Mississippi Rural Attorneys Program within the Mississippi Bar. The bill would establish a statewide commission tasked with designating rural and underserved areas and recruiting attorneys to practice in those communities.<sup>11</sup>

Under the proposal, participating attorneys would receive practice-startup stipends to support the establishment of private law practices in designated rural



The poster features a dark purple background with ornate, light-colored scrollwork in the corners. The text is centered and reads: "Annual Meeting 2026 Illinois State Bar Association" in a large, elegant serif font. Below this, a decorative flourish separates the title from the date and location: "June 11-12, 2026 | The Ritz-Carlton | St. Louis, Missouri". Further down, it says "WELCOMING PERRY J. BROWDER AS THE 2026-27 ISBA PRESIDENT". The main body of text invites attendees to join in the dynamic Clayton business district of St. Louis, highlighting the luxurious amenities of the Ritz-Carlton and the opportunity to connect with colleagues. It concludes with the phrase "We hope to see you there!". At the bottom, the website "isba.org/annual" is provided.

areas, with full stipend forgiveness after five years of continuous rural practice. The bill also directs the commission to develop mentorship and practice-support systems, reflecting a policy focus on long-term retention and private-practice sustainability, rather than short-term placements. Although the bill ultimately died in committee, it signals a growing legislative interest in bar-administered rural recruitment models that may reappear in future sessions.<sup>12</sup>

### Dakotas continue to operate national model rural attorney programs

South Dakota and North Dakota continue to operate some of the nation's longest-running rural attorney recruitment programs, which are frequently cited as models for addressing persistent legal deserts. South Dakota's Rural Attorney Recruitment Program, established in 2013, provides annual incentive payments to attorneys who commit to practicing full-time in qualifying rural counties or municipalities for a five-year term. The program is funded through a shared partnership among the state judicial branch, the State Bar of South Dakota, and participating local governments, reflecting

a collaborative approach to sustaining rural legal services.<sup>13</sup>

North Dakota has adopted a similar framework, offering annual stipends to attorneys who agree to multi-year rural practice commitments in designated counties. Retention data from both states suggests that attorneys who establish professional and community ties during their incentive period are more likely to remain in rural practice after program completion, supporting the theory that long-term financial support combined with local integration is more effective than short-term recruitment efforts. As a result, the Dakota programs continue to inform legislative and bar-driven rural practice initiatives nationwide.<sup>14</sup> ■

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# AI in the Small Law Firm – The Need for a Formal Written Policy

BY EDWARD J. JAROT, JR. & WILLIAM D. LOHRMAN

**BEGINNING WITH FAX MACHINES,** and continuing through the explosion of the internet, cellphones, e-mail, and texting, technological developments have required revisions to existing policies, as well as the creation of wholly new policies. Carefully drafted policies are especially critical in the setting of a small firm, where the attorney is constantly torn between performing legal services while also balancing the legal and ethical limitations and pitfalls.

AI applications require a clear, thought-out policy for the small law firm. For all the power that AI offers, such firms are strongly encouraged to develop and refine an express policy for the use of chatbots, generative AI, and the other AI tools currently available, along with those that will be created in the immediate future.

Below is a sample AI policy that has been developed for my firm. Please realize that this policy, like any company policy, is malleable and must be constantly reviewed and adjusted to fit the firm's specific composition and practices as well as changes to existing and future AI applications.

## FIRM POLICY FOR USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

- Employees (both attorneys and staff) seeking to use an Artificial Intelligence (“AI”) application are required to check with their supervising attorney for review and/or approval.
- Only AI applications that have been approved by the Firm's Leadership Committee may be utilized by the Firm's employees. The Leadership Committee shall keep a company-wide list of approved AI applications with a detailed description of permitted uses for the AI application. Employees are strictly prohibited from using an AI

application for any work purpose that has not been listed on the approved list or has been approved in advance by the Leadership Committee.

- If any employee is seeking approval of an AI application, the employee must at a minimum:
  - Send a written request to any member of the Leadership Committee.
  - Provide a link to the AI application website for reference.
  - Provide a short description of the intended use of the AI application.
- In the event an employee has a question regarding the appropriate use of any AI application, the employee should reach out to her/his supervising attorney, who will then discuss the issue with a member of the Leadership Committee.
- Attorneys may use approved AI applications for the purposes of drafting legal documents or for legal research. Staff may use such AI applications ONLY at the request of and under the direct supervision of her/his supervising attorney.
- Approved AI applications that do not involve legal drafting and research (i.e., applications that relate to work processes and time efficiency) may be used provided client data and confidentiality are not utilized and the employee thoroughly reviews any work product.
- Attorneys may use discretion for utilizing approved AI applications, both directly and through staff, with the understanding that the Attorney is ultimately responsible for the final review, specific content and ultimate dissemination and application of all

work product produced under the AI application to the same extent that the attorney drafted such content without the use of an AI application.

- Employees must always consider client confidentiality and other ethical considerations prior to the use of any AI application. In the event of any question regarding the use of an AI application the employee shall reach out to her/his supervising attorney and/or the Leadership Committee.
- All Employees recognize that AI applications are merely additional tools available to enhance her/his work product and productivity. Common sense should always be used so that the utilization of any AI application is done in a professional and ethical manner, and in the collective best interests of the Firm, the Firm's clients, and the integrity of the legal profession. ■

*This article was originally published in The Prompt (March 2025, Vol. 1, No. 2), the newsletter of ISBA's Standing Committee on Artificial Intelligence & the Practice of Law.*



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# Unlocking the Potential of Generative AI for Lawyers: Red Flags and Best Practices

BY CAROLYN ELEFANT

**GENERATIVE AI (GenAI) IS REVOLUTIONIZING** industries worldwide, including the legal profession. While this technology presents immense opportunities, it also comes with unique challenges that lawyers must understand and navigate. This guide highlights the red flags lawyers should watch for when using GenAI and offers actionable best practices to ensure its ethical and effective use in legal practice.

## Why Generative AI matters for lawyers

GenAI tools like ChatGPT, Claude, and Perplexity have the potential to transform how lawyers work. From drafting legal documents to summarizing transcripts and analyzing case law, these tools offer significant time savings and increased efficiency. However, lawyers must balance the convenience of AI with the profession's ethical obligations of accuracy and due diligence.

## Common red flags in using Generative AI

### 1. Document Formatting Errors

AI often struggles with certain file formats, especially scanned PDFs that lack proper OCR (Optical Character Recognition). If you upload a poorly formatted document, AI may fabricate or misinterpret its contents. Uploading text-based formats like Word documents or plain text can help ensure accuracy.

### 2. Math and Numerical Discrepancies

Despite its advanced capabilities, GenAI is prone to calculation errors. Lawyers who rely on AI for fee calculations or analyzing numerical data must double-check its output. Interestingly, while AI is unreliable at performing calculations, it excels at identifying inconsistencies in numerical data, such as discrepancies in tables.

### 3. Inaccurate Visual Representations

When asked to generate diagrams or visual aids, GenAI often misrepresents scale or dimensions. For example, AI-generated images of transmission lines might depict incorrect distances or numbers of affected properties. While useful for preliminary brainstorming, lawyers should not rely on AI-generated visuals for court presentations or legal arguments.

### 4. Imprecise Contract Analysis

AI tools frequently oversimplify or misinterpret complex contract terms. For instance, an indemnification clause might be summarized incorrectly, omitting critical details. Moreover, AI can conflate terms, turning "A or B" obligations into "A and B." Lawyers must manually verify all AI-generated summaries to avoid malpractice risks.

### 5. Fabricated Legal Citations

Perhaps the most infamous red flag is AI's tendency to "hallucinate" legal citations. While the output may look realistic,



the referenced cases or articles may not exist. Even when AI provides seemingly legitimate links, lawyers must click through and verify the sources to ensure authenticity.

### 6. Misunderstandings and Misreadings

AI tools occasionally misinterpret even straightforward documents, leading to significant errors. For example, when tasked with summarizing a Supreme Court transcript, ChatGPT generated inaccurate summaries of the arguments. This demonstrates the importance of cross-checking AI outputs with the original documents.

### 7. Inherent Biases

Generative AI models often reflect societal biases. For instance, a generic request for an image of a lawyer might yield a white man in a suit unless explicitly instructed otherwise. Similarly, gendered assumptions can influence AI-generated content, such as emphasizing work-life balance for women over professional goals.

### Bonus Red Flag: Plagiarism Risks

AI-generated content can inadvertently replicate existing materials, raising potential copyright concerns. Before using AI-generated marketing or blog content, lawyers should run it through a plagiarism checker to avoid legal disputes.

## Best practices for using GenAI in legal practice

To mitigate risks and maximize benefits, lawyers should adopt the following strategies:

### 1. Understand the Limitations

Awareness of GenAI's potential pitfalls is the first step to

responsible use. Recognize where the technology excels (e.g., spotting data inconsistencies) and where it struggles (e.g., legal reasoning or numerical calculations).

### 2. Verify All Outputs

Whether it's a contract review, case citation, or legal brief, always double-check the AI-generated content. Treat the AI as a junior associate whose work requires supervision.

### 3. Use Paid Models

Paid versions of tools like ChatGPT and Claude offer advanced capabilities, including higher character limits and improved accuracy. Investing in these versions ensures better performance.

### 4. Cross-Check Using Multiple Platforms

Leverage different GenAI tools to validate outputs. For example, use ChatGPT for drafting and Perplexity for verifying citations. This redundancy reduces the risk of relying on incorrect information.

### 5. Provide Specific Prompts

Detailed and precise instructions improve AI output. For instance, if generating marketing images, specify diverse representations to counteract biases.

### 6. Incorporate AI Training

Correct errors by providing feedback to the AI platform. This

not only improves your interaction but contributes to refining the technology for broader use.

### 7. Run Plagiarism Checks

Before publishing AI-generated content, ensure originality by using plagiarism detection tools. Even better, personalize the content to reflect your unique voice and insights.

## Embracing AI responsibly

Generative AI offers unparalleled opportunities for innovation in legal practice, but it is not a silver bullet. By understanding its limitations and implementing safeguards, lawyers can harness its potential while maintaining the profession's high standards of accuracy and integrity.

As technology evolves, staying informed and adaptable will be key to leveraging AI responsibly. If you're ready to dive deeper into GenAI for lawyers, consider joining specialized training programs to refine your skills and stay ahead in this rapidly changing landscape. ■

*This article was originally published on January 21, 2025, on the MyShingle.com blog of Law Offices of Carolyn Elefant, and is republished here with permission.*

# Member Appreciation & Recognition *Reception*

May 14, 2026 | The Morton Arboretum | Lisle, IL

## *Celebrate* Member Appreciation Month!

Join us on May 14 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. for our annual Member Appreciation and Recognition Reception. Congratulate the 2025-2026 ISBA Award recipients, connect with your ISBA friends and colleagues, and enjoy an evening of networking at the beautiful Morton Arboretum. The reception will feature hors d'oeuvres and complimentary beer and wine. We hope to see you there!

[isba.org/events/memberappreciation](https://isba.org/events/memberappreciation)



# ISBA Rural Practice Section Council Member Profile: Casey Parker

## Background and introduction

1. Full Name: Casey Parker
2. Hometown/Current Residence: Carbondale, IL
3. Law School Attended and Year of Graduation: SIU 2003
4. Year Admitted to the Illinois Bar: 2003
5. Current Role or Status (e.g., practicing attorney, judge, retired): Director of Career Services, SIU Simmons Law School
6. Brief overview of your current or most recent practice: I have worked for SIU in some capacity for 15 years.

## Career path and practice

**Q: What inspired you to pursue a legal career, particularly in a rural setting?**

A: Grew up in a small town.

**Q: What areas of law have you focused on throughout your career?**

A: Criminal, municipal, and civil rights.

**Q: Did you always intend to practice in a rural area?**

A: Yes.

**Q: Describe your typical client base and the community you serve.**

A: I have always worked for the government.

**Q: What do you enjoy most about your legal career?**

A: Being able to do many different things.



Casey Parker

**Q: What aspects of the practice were most challenging or frustrating?**

A: The politics (again, I've always worked a government job).

**Q: Was there anything you actively worked to change or improve in the legal system or in your practice environment?**

A: How students from regional universities are perceived.

**Q: How has rural legal practice changed over the course of your career?**

A: More important now as there are less attorneys.

## Accomplishments and contributions

**Q: What professional accomplish-**

**ments are you most proud of?**

A: Being recognized for my public service work.

**Q: Have you been involved in community service, local organizations, or bar association work? Please describe.**

A: I have served on many boards and been involved in my local bar association for years.

**Q: Are there any cases, projects, or experiences that stand out as especially meaningful or impactful?**

A: No.

## Looking ahead

**Q: What advice would you give to young attorneys considering rural practice?**

A: It will provide the best work/life balance and you will be considered a great asset to the community.

**Q: What opportunities do you think exist today in rural law practice that didn't exist earlier in your career?**

A: When I graduated, the job market was much smaller.

**Q: How can the Rural Practice Section Council better support attorneys in rural areas?**

A: By helping to entice folks to small towns.

**Q: Are there services, programs, or initiatives you'd like to see the Illinois State Bar Association expand or implement?**

A: The RP Fellowship! ■