

Introduction

In the summer of 2022, I was in the middle of South Dakota in the small town of Fort Pierre (population 2,115) attending a conference about strengthening rural communities.¹ During the first day of the conference, rural community members – none of them lawyers – talked about different programs and strategies they had used to strengthen their rural communities. I spent that first day listening to these rural stories and reflecting on the many concerns raised that could easily be addressed by a local lawyer: the small businesses needing to incorporate. The organizations that would be better off as nonprofits. The communities trying to plan housing developments that needed legal advice on deeds. The cities weighing opportunities but needing compliance advice.

At supper, after I confessed to being a lawyer, I sorely disappointed my tablemates by acknowledging my absolute lack of knowledge on business formation law. Plus, I could not provide advice to the librarian seated next to me about handling liability risks for renting out the local library space to private parties. But that relatively simple legal question might be a critically important one for a rural community where the library has the only rentable space for events – the space sorely needed for baby showers, graduation celebrations, and ninetieth birthday parties. What became obvious throughout that first day is that a local lawyer, invested in improving a rural community, could make so many of the ideas and projects more viable. Yet the conference on strengthening rural communities had not once mentioned access to lawyers, or – perhaps more accurately – the lack of access to lawyers.

On the second day of the conference, my morning began as I stepped into the hotel elevator and came face-to-face with a retired Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of South Dakota – David Gilbertson. As South Dakota's longest-serving Chief Justice, Gilbertson spent his last decade on the bench as a champion for South Dakota's Rural Attorney Recruitment Program – the inspiration for this book and a

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the population sizes throughout this book are drawn from the most recent Census data available. *Explore Census Data*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, <https://perma.cc/3L9P-SHW3> (last visited Feb. 16, 2024).

program aimed at replenishing South Dakota's rural lawyers. In that short elevator ride, we talked about South Dakota's shortage of rural lawyers and the incentive program South Dakota developed to replenish the supply of rural lawyers. An incentive program was not always needed. According to Gilbertson, "at one time, access to legal services in rural South Dakota existed."² The problem is, now retiring rural lawyers are not being replaced.

Rural areas nationwide are suffering a shortage of lawyers. The American Bar Association ("ABA") releases an annual profile on the legal profession. The most recent findings, released in 2023, report more than 1.3 million lawyers in the United States, but show disproportionate placement in urban areas.³ In the 2020 report, the ABA tracked county-level data on where lawyers practice. Calling the rural areas with few lawyers "Legal Deserts," the ABA report captures in comprehensive data what rural-focused advocates have been saying for years: There is a widespread and growing rural lawyer shortage across the nation.⁴

When this shortage came to light in South Dakota, the state invested in a rural lawyer incentive program because the state invests in rural communities. This investment came despite South Dakota being a fiscally conservative state, and one of the country's most conservative states overall.⁵ When Chief Justice Gilbertson and leaders of the state bar began advocating for a program to draw more lawyers to rural South Dakota, they focused on both community needs and the economic viability of rural law practice. Investing in recruiting a new rural lawyer is not only about providing a stable job to one person. That new lawyer helps make a community more vibrant and functional.

Rural county and municipal governments need lawyers – for prosecutorial and defense work, for abuse and neglect cases, to serve as judges – and having local lawyers in rural areas means the government need not pay for travel, keeping costs low. Rural governments also need lawyers to serve in advisory roles and provide legal representation to the government when litigation arises. When there are no local lawyers, small local governments – often running on shoestring budgets – end up paying lawyers to travel from bigger towns. In some cases, small towns just do not hire legal counsel, even for important matters.⁶

Lawyers also serve private clients in rural communities, providing critical legal services to residents who would otherwise need to travel, use online services, or entirely forgo meeting their legal needs. Attorneys not only know the law, but

² Hon. David Gilbertson, *Reflections on the Rural Practice of Law in South Dakota: Past, Present, and Future*, 59 S.D. L. REV. 433, 433 (2014).

³ A.B.A. *Profile of the Legal Profession* (2023), A.B.A., <https://perma.cc/8SBW-MG4F>.

⁴ A.B.A. *Profile of the Legal Profession* (2020), A.B.A., <https://perma.cc/42ZK-SLD4>.

⁵ Brad Dress, *Here Are the 50 Legislatures Ranked from Most to Least Conservative*, THE HILL (Dec. 6, 2022), <https://perma.cc/ZVM4-U3HJ>.

⁶ *Town of Wood v. Good Shield*, 188 N.W.2d 757, 757 (S.D. 1971) (noting that "the Town of Wood (pop. 132) has not responded or appeared because of lack of funds to employ counsel").

they also guide clients through stressful times with legal and nonlegal problems. Studying rural lawyers over thirty years ago, Donald Landon explained that lawyers are “frequently expected to act outside their specialty to provide business and economic advice, or provide clients with a sympathetic ear or organizational know-how.”⁷ Michele Statz, an anthropologist of law, describes lawyers as “bear[ing] the burden of the problem – the crisis – so it may be solved in a dignified and just way.”⁸ This guiding role may be particularly important in rural communities where there are few other services available.

Lawyers tend to be involved citizens, often serving on boards or running for office. Lawyers are problem solvers, both for their clients and their larger communities. While urban areas have plenty of law-educated individuals to fill these roles, a rural community may have no one with a law degree. Similarly, larger communities probably have government employees who write grants; rural areas probably do not.⁹ A few lawyers in any rural community can shift the level of expertise for local entities, making nonprofits and other organizations more viable. When rural lawyers help community members form nonprofits or businesses, shopping stays local, providing jobs and keeping sales tax local. Strong local businesses and nonprofits can then keep rural communities vibrant despite countervailing economic forces. There are some lawyers in rural South Dakota that have made clear and identifiable impacts on the growth of their rural communities even outside of their legal jobs. For example, Kelsea Kenzy Sutton in Burke, population 579, graduated from law school in 2014 and now serves as counsel to the local bank in her hometown. Since returning home, Sutton has proven herself as a capable grant-writer, obtaining funds to create a splash pad in her small town.¹⁰

These contributions can help rural places sustain their communities. To sustain a population that prevents school consolidation. To sustain local businesses that create a stable tax base. To sustain churches, community halls, and local cafés. To avoid becoming the kind of community that Michelle Wilde Anderson labels as “border-to-border low-income” when she writes about city and county governments where economic distress has taken hold across an entire community, not just in small pockets.¹¹ As Anderson demonstrates, border-to-border low-income communities struggle to survive, let alone thrive, because the tax base simply cannot provide services. Rural areas are often poor, but they are not all destined to this downward spiral.

⁷ DONALD D. LANDON, *COUNTRY LAWYERS: THE IMPACT OF CONTEXT ON PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE* 5 (1990).

⁸ Michele Statz et al., “*They Had Access, but They Didn’t Get Justice*”: Why Prevailing Access to Justice Initiatives Fail Rural Americans, 28 *GEO. J. ON POVERTY L. & POL’Y* 321, 375 (2021).

⁹ MICHELLE WILDE ANDERSON, *THE FIGHT TO SAVE THE TOWN: REIMAGINING DISCARDED AMERICA* 108 (2022).

¹⁰ Renee Ortiz, “*I Think This Project is About Love*”: New Splash Pad Opens in Burke, *KELOLAND* (Aug. 7, 2022), <https://perma.cc/PY9J-TD2G>.

¹¹ ANDERSON, *supra* note 9, at 5.

Some reading this book may wonder why we should care about these rural communities. Why, in the face of decades of population loss and economic stagnation, should investments be made to sustain and improve rural America? Why not, as one commentator suggested, “pack rural America up” and have rural residents “move elsewhere” if they want better jobs and more satisfying lives?¹² As a product of rural America, I find this perspective misguided. Of course we should care about the people and places of rural America. Just like we should care about so many other people and places that make America the beautiful, diverse, pluralistic society she is. Because this entire book is premised on the idea that rural America matters, it is worth explaining why it does, both to me and to the other people who reside there.

All four of my grandparents were born in rural America in the 1910s and 1920s. Two in southeastern Kentucky, deep in the rural foothills of the Appalachian Mountains where the ancient mountains are so close together the sun disappears hours before dark and roads are hard to build. Two in southeastern South Dakota, out on the prairies where the wind is constant and the droughts of the 1930s pushed many families – including those of my grandparents – from their farms into small towns. My mother grew up in rural Kentucky in her parents’ home county. My father grew up in several South Dakota towns. My parents settled outside of Yankton, South Dakota, on an acre of land on the Missouri River bluffs that sometimes requires four-wheel drive for winter access. But the steep gravel road to their home is worth the sweeping views of the Missouri. The neighboring cow pasture of my childhood has now been replaced with beautiful houses for commuters and vacationers, but the trees and sweeping views remain.

Rural areas and rural history have always been a part of my life. My great-great-uncle penned a moving poem about homesteading and breaking the virgin sod of rural South Dakota.¹³ That poem now prominently hangs in my office. My South Dakota grandmother taught high school English in some tiny towns and published a historical essay about rural South Dakota.¹⁴ An aunt in Kentucky keeps relics and documents from the family’s rural past; a cousin who is already writing about the history and culture of Appalachia hopes to write a book chronicling the family history my aunt has preserved.¹⁵ We often visited family in rural areas of South Dakota and Kentucky. We frequented small towns for their festivals, bakeries, and stores. I drove thirty minutes through rural South Dakota to buy my prom and wedding dresses in a town of 1,000. We hiked in state and National Parks. My children are

¹² Allan Golombek, *Sorry New York Times, Rural America Cannot be Saved*, REALCLEARMARKETS (Dec. 18, 2018), <https://perma.cc/ZKL3-HEZM>.

¹³ Rudolf C. Ruste, *Last of the Virgin Sod* (1912) (full text available in Hilmer H. Laudre, *The Fruitful Plains*, 61 TRANSACTIONS KAN. ACAD. SCI. 16, 16–17 (1958)).

¹⁴ Doris Alsgaard, *Start with One Cabin*, in DAKOTA PANORAMA 79 (J. Leonard Jenneweine & Jane Boorman, eds. 1961).

¹⁵ MATTHEW R. SPARKS & OLIVIA SIZEMORE, *HAINT COUNTRY: DARK FOLKTALES FROM THE HILLS AND HOLLERS* (2024).

growing up in a similar world. We live in a town of 10,000 in South Dakota, but frequently interact with more rural communities.

Being in rural spaces is normal for me, and I never questioned whether rural people and places deserved to survive and be nourished. In law school in Berkeley, I once did a class presentation about law in rural areas, and a classmate commented how they had “never thought” about rural people or places and why they matter. For a student body attuned to the diversity and inequities of America, I learned that rural America was a blind spot for many of my classmates. For many urban Americans, feelings of apathy toward rural America turned to anger following the 2016 election of President Donald Trump.¹⁶ Angry accusations were thrown at rural America – too white, too conservative, too self-interested, too powerful. But those labels do not accurately capture the reality of rural America.

Defining and categorizing what counts as rural is difficult. The Census Bureau’s definition is a good place to start, that “rural” is any area not designated as urban. Under the 2020 Census, urban areas require only 2,000 housing units or a population of 5,000.¹⁷ Using this definition, 20 percent of Americans live in rural areas, with 80 percent in urban areas.¹⁸ Yet the rural-designated areas make up about 97 percent of the country’s landmass, playing a critical role in the economic structure of the United States.

Much of that rural land is used for agriculture. Farms alone, without considering any related industries, contributed 164.7 billion dollars to the United States gross domestic product in 2021.¹⁹ American farmers grow most of the domestically consumed food. American agricultural exports were 192 billion dollars in 2022. Of course, food does not just grow – it requires labor. In 2022, 1.3 percent of United States employment was on farms, accounting for 2.6 million jobs.²⁰ Other rural industries, including food processing and tourism, employ even more workers.

Imagine for a moment we indulged the angry commentators telling rural Americans to pack up and move to cities if they want services like libraries, pools, healthcare, and legal representation. Rural communities would dwindle, decreasing the labor pool available for agricultural work. Those agricultural workers could relocate to cities, and farms could bus in 2.6 million workers to farm our food. All of America might start to resemble the exploitative farm labor system in parts of California where farm laborers live hours from worksites, requiring them to take

¹⁶ Lisa R. Pruitt, *The Women Feminism Forgot: Rural and Working-Class White Women in the Era of Trump*, 49 U. TOL. L. REV. 537, 553 (2018).

¹⁷ Michael Ratcliff, *Redefining Urban Areas Following the 2020 Census*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (Dec. 22, 2022), <https://perma.cc/5NGJ-96QG>.

¹⁸ *Nation’s Urban and Rural Populations Shift Following 2020 Census*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (Dec. 29, 2022), <https://perma.cc/26R3-EN8E>.

¹⁹ *Ag and Food Sectors and the Economy*, ECON. RSCH SERV., U.S. DEP’T OF AG. (Jan. 26, 2023), <https://perma.cc/Z879-RV53>.

²⁰ *Id.*

buses and carpools to far-flung fields where they are underpaid for long hours of work and often face unnecessary safety risks. While those farm workers (who are hypothetically enjoying the services available in larger communities) take long bus-rides into rural areas to work long hours, not only do the workers lose the benefits of the services available where they live, their children are left without parent supervision in those urban areas. This system does not benefit anyone. Keeping rural communities strong means keeping schools, hospitals, and other services strong, which in turn keeps workers local.

Investing in rural communities is not just about investing in white communities. Rural America is already diverse and becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. In 2020, 24 percent of rural Americans were people of color.²¹ Significant populations of Native American, Black Americans, Latinx Americans, and Asian Americans live in rural America, though largely concentrated in different regions. In South Dakota, where I conducted my research, Native Americans are the largest minority population. Nationwide, a higher percentage of Native Americans are rural than any other group. Calculations vary depending on how rural is defined, but the best calculation is that over half of Native Americans live in rural communities.²² Reservations are mostly rural, and often remote, making strong local communities even more important.

To argue that rural America does not deserve investment, or that its population should give up and move to cities, is dismissive of the economic and cultural value of rural America. Native American communities cherish land that has long been inhabited by their ancestors. Black Americans and Latinx Americans live in rural communities connected to generations of their ancestors. New immigrants of color are establishing strong communities in rural parts of the country. Descendants of much earlier European immigrants continue to keep ancestral traditions alive in rural areas. In my corner of South Dakota, you will find the Yankton Sioux Tribe maintaining its culture and small towns holding festivals that celebrate the roots of European settlers, including Danish Days, Czech Days, Schmeckfest, and more. The traditions alive in Native American and other rural communities make rural America vibrant. Neglecting the rural parts of our country and asking these rural populations to abandon their connection to the land and traditions is both deeply offensive and ill advised.

Rural America also offers a different type of lifestyle. Most Americans prefer to live in urban areas, with each Census showing growth in urban areas and decline in rural. While more of the United States population prefers to live in big cities, there are many people who *want* a rural or small-town lifestyle. Those people who want

²¹ D. W. Rowlands & Hanna Love, *Mapping Rural America's Diversity and Demographic Change*, BROOKINGS (Sept. 28, 2021), <https://perma.cc/WW7Q-G6GM>.

²² Sarah Dewees & Benjamin Marks, *Research Note – Twice Invisible: Understanding Rural Native America*, FIRST NATIONS DEV. INST. (Apr. 2017), <https://perma.cc/7KzV-LLEq>.

to leave rural communities largely have the capacity to do so, as has been demonstrated through population shifts over time. Those who stay in rural communities often want to stay. The difference in lifestyle cannot be discounted. If we invest in rural opportunities that create more jobs and better stability, there will be more opportunities for rural residents to stay where they have kinship and community ties.

Rural investment could also open the opportunity for increased diversity. More Native Americans might return to their home reservations if those communities were strengthened. More new immigrants might settle in small towns where housing and land are affordable. European immigrants, like my ancestors, often settled on free land provided by the Homestead Act. Modern immigrants might be attracted to rural areas with affordable housing so long as there is a need for workers. Huron, South Dakota, while not technically rural with a population over 14,000, does provide an example of increasing diversity in a relatively isolated and small town. In 2000, Huron was 96 percent white and had a falling population. Since taking purposeful recruitment and investment in education and affordable housing programs, Huron has grown and diversified its population. By 2022, Huron's population was only 69 percent white, with 16 percent of the population born outside the country. Even more telling for the future of Huron, 46 percent of the K-12 students in Huron are of Asian or Latinx descent.²³ That community growth did not just happen; it required available jobs and an invested community.

Rural areas matter and deserve investment to remain viable and even thrive. Yet lawyers, just one of the tools available to help rural areas, are in steep decline. Retirements and deaths have left too many small towns without a local lawyer, and too many rural residents without access to legal services. Without accessible legal services, businesses may not form, estate plans may not be written, and communities may wither.

Though the rural lawyer shortage impacts nearly every jurisdiction, policy responses have been lacking. Only North Dakota, South Dakota, and Illinois have programs that pay rural lawyers directly. Several other states have legal incubators to train rural lawyers before they begin practice. Various states have also experimented with funding rural summer internships or other methods of connecting aging attorneys with potential successors. There have also been attempts to leverage technology – especially during the COVID-19 pandemic – to have urban lawyers serve the legal needs of rural residents remotely. Urban lawyers and law students also serve rural legal needs in many states through traveling clinics that temporarily provide services in rural areas. Then there are the programs aimed at creating education pathways. A number of law schools offer rural courses or clinics, with a few more offering loan forgiveness for rural practice.

Law professor Lisa Pruitt has been at the forefront of documenting the rural lawyer shortage in the United States and describing the responses to that shortage,

²³ PBS NewsHour, *South Dakota Town Embraces New Immigrants Vital to Meat Industry*, S.D. PUB. BROAD (July 2, 2016), <https://perma.cc/UL7D-TK6A>.

including conducting the only existing study about lawyer and law student opinions on rural practice.²⁴ In surveying the policy responses attempted by different states, Pruitt concludes that the “current institutional responses ... provide little hope for reversing” the rural lawyer shortage.²⁵ As she says, “[o]nly a handful of States have been willing to spend money” on these programs, with South Dakota standing out among the states for “put[ing] its money where its mouth is.”²⁶

Indeed, in 2013 South Dakota became the nation’s leader in trying to alleviate the rural lawyer crisis by creating what would become known as the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program. This program, as a partnership between the State of South Dakota, the State Bar of South Dakota, and the local rural communities, provides stipends for rural lawyers. For a decade, South Dakota has been touted as the nation’s leader in solving the rural lawyer crisis, but in the beginning, no one knew whether the lawyers entering South Dakota’s program would stick around. In fact, some have been dismissive of the program, arguing “there is no demonstrated evidence” that lawyers will stay rural.²⁷

Now, a decade after the program was launched, I have the first opportunity to analyze the long-term success of the program. In short, it has gone well. Not every lawyer who participated in the program has stayed, and not every participant has enjoyed rural legal practice, but the vast majority of them have. This book is a study of new rural lawyers that includes analysis of how a stipend influences the first few years of rural law practice. In this way, the book provides a comprehensive study of the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program participants in the first ten years of the program, from 2013 until 2023. The analysis of how a *program* can help new rural lawyers should offer lessons for recruitment and retention in rural areas across the country.

South Dakota, with a population of just over 900,000 in 2024, remains a very rural state despite major growth in some of the state’s largest cities. South Dakota *has* lawyers – 2,026 by latest count.²⁸ Those lawyers are just disproportionately located in the state’s three biggest towns and its capital city. In 2013, when the program began, 65 percent of South Dakota’s lawyers lived in Sioux Falls, Rapid City, Aberdeen, and Pierre.²⁹ In 2023, those same four cities contained 72 percent of South Dakota’s

²⁴ Lisa R. Pruitt et al., *Justice in the Hinterlands: Arkansas as a Case Study of the Rural Lawyer Shortage and Evidence-Based Solutions to Alleviate It*, 37 U. ARK. LITTLE ROCK L. REV. 573 (2015).

²⁵ Kelly V. Beskin & Lisa R. Pruitt, *A Survey of Policy Responses to the Rural Attorney Shortage in the United States*, in ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES 7, 7 (Daniel Newman & Faith Gordon, eds. 2023).

²⁶ *Id.* at 25.

²⁷ Brian L. Lynch, *Access to Legal Services in Rural Areas of the Northern Rockies: A Recommendation for Town Legal Centers*, 90 IND. L.J. 1683, 1693 (2015).

²⁸ A.B.A. *Profile of the Legal Profession* (2022), A.B.A., <https://perma.cc/Y9YX-CLEX>.

²⁹ Ethan Bronner, *No Lawyer for Miles, So One Rural State Offers Pay*, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 8, 2013), <http://perma.cc/4M6L-UADA> (for articles behind paywalls, like with the *New York Times*, click “view the live page” to view the original).

lawyers.³⁰ This is not to say that there are too many lawyers in South Dakota's largest communities. In fact, South Dakota ranks near the bottom of lawyers per capita, and there are excess legal jobs available in the state, including in these larger communities.

While more lawyers are entering practice in South Dakota's larger communities, the same is not happening in rural places. The state's rural communities are losing baby boomer lawyers to retirement at a steady clip, and simultaneously have declining numbers of high school graduates, thus shrinking the pool of potential replacement lawyers. Even when a rural student manages to overcome educational disadvantages to make it through college and law school, it is not always easy for those new lawyers to see a viable path into rural practice.³¹ The path of least resistance is often to take a salaried job in the biggest cities or the state capital; after all, the firms are always hiring.

After decades of rural lawyer loss, South Dakota actually did something about it. In 2005, Chief Justice Gilbertson started using his annual speech to the legislature to address the growing rural lawyer shortage. In 2011, two prominent South Dakota attorneys with deep rural connections – Bob Morris and Pat Goetzinger – formed a working group through the state bar called Project Rural Practice. After years of work and advocacy by Chief Justice Gilbertson and Project Rural Practice, in 2013 the South Dakota Legislature passed a law authorizing a pilot program to fund sixteen lawyers who would practice in rural areas. A participating lawyer signs a contract agreeing to stay in their rural community for five years and practice law at least thirty-five hours a week. At the end of each year, the participating attorney receives a stipend from the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program for 12,513.60 dollars. After five years the stipend ends and the program hopes that participants will stay permanently in their rural practices.

The law was signed on March 25, 2013, and went into effect on July 1, 2013. Immediately the search began for new lawyers willing to commit to rural practice with the support of this stipend. On May 7, 2014, the first participant began the program. As of July 1, 2023, a total of thirty-two attorneys have taken part in the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program. At the ten-year anniversary, twenty-four of those attorneys were currently practicing law in their rural communities, with one more teaching middle school in her rural community. Only seven participants left their rural communities.

The conclusions of this book are largely based on qualitative interviews I conducted with lawyers who have participated in the Rural Attorney Recruitment

³⁰ John Hult, *Rural Lawyer Recruitment Efforts Show Local Results, but Fail to Alter Urban-Rural Divide*, S.D. SEARCHLIGHT (Jan. 15, 2023), <https://perma.cc/LFA3-LX52>.

³¹ Bart Pfankuch, *Rural Schools in S.D. Face Unique Challenges That Can Affect Learning*, S.D. NEWS WATCH (Nov. 7, 2019), <https://perma.cc/VXQ5-N9YG>; ROBERT WUTHNOW, *THE LEFT BEHIND: DECLINE AND RAGE IN SMALL-TOWN AMERICA* 61 (2018).

Program. The interviews were semistructured, where I asked the same open-ended questions, allowing interviewees to share their own stories. All thirty-two lawyers who have ever participated in the program met with me to discuss their time in rural practice and their views on the program. Every attorney who remains in their rural community invited me into their law office for an in-person interview, letting me learn about their small towns and their workspaces. To get a better sense of their rural practices, I watched several participants in court, attended a city council meeting where a participant served as counsel, watched a different participant present at a continuing legal education event, read appellate briefs filed by participants, and – among other activities – toured an oil field where one participant works when he's not practicing law. For participants who left their rural communities, interviews were either in person or on Zoom.

In addition to my core interviews with participating lawyers, I interviewed a dozen mentoring attorneys and a number of key players who brought this program into existence. I also interviewed four lawyers who had strong interest in participating in the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program but did not do so. Then there were some less formal conversations I had with people who knew the lawyers. A talkative woman in an airport had hired a lawyer I interviewed. One of my mom's friends knew a lawyer from when he was a kid on swim team; another of her friends had taught a couple of the lawyers in college courses. Hotel clerks were happy to share their views on the local lawyers I was visiting. A few of my current students grew up in some of these towns and shared their perspectives. A friend-of-a-friend is the son of one of the mentoring attorneys. These conversations with nonlawyers helped add context to my main interviews, providing a different perspective on rural lawyers. Also providing a different perspective were interviews with rural lawyers and policy-makers from other states.

Relying on those interviews, *The Rural Lawyer* provides a modern account of how new rural lawyers settle into their careers. Though it also captures the story of the first ten years of South Dakota's Rural Attorney Recruitment Program, the story is broader than just thirty-two lawyers in one state. Instead, it draws lessons from these lawyers' experiences to help other rural lawyers improve their practices and other states craft similar programs. Chapter 2 looks at rural lawyers across America, starting with a historical perspective, considering changes in the profession, and ending with a description of rural lawyers today. Chapter 3 turns to various policy responses to the rural lawyer shortage, looking at what jurisdictions have tried in attempts to combat the growing shortage, including South Dakota's Rural Attorney Recruitment Program.

Then the book pivots to the issues facing new rural lawyers. Throughout the remaining chapters, data from the interviewed South Dakota lawyers is used to provide evidence of how one program has succeeded (or not) in addressing issues faced by new rural lawyers. Chapter 4 looks at the backgrounds of those lawyers, discussing how they ended up in rural legal practice, including why they attended law school

and why they had an interest in practicing in rural communities. This can help law schools and rural communities understand how to recruit new rural lawyers.

The South Dakota program requires buy-in from local communities, so Chapter 5 focuses on the process of participants getting programmatic approval. Chapter 5 also covers some more practical steps of starting a practice, such as finding office space and housing. Chapter 6 looks at whether the lawyers were accepted or not in their new rural practices. This includes whether the lawyers have felt welcomed in their communities, whether the lawyers were accepted by local lawyers, and whether community members brought business to the lawyers. Chapter 7 turns to the actual practice of law, surveying practice areas.

While the feedback on the Rural Attorney Recruitment Program is overwhelmingly positive, two common themes arose when participants expressed concerns about rural practice: mentorship and finances. Chapters 8 and 9 address those two concerns. The concerns, though, do not amount to insurmountable barriers to success. Indeed, the program has been very successful. Chapters 10 and 11 summarize that success and look to the future. Chapter 10 looks at the communities and what services those lawyers provided, including a robust discussion of whether rural communities benefit from having lawyers. Chapter 11 returns to a focus on the lawyers themselves with a look at their longevity in rural practice as well as their thoughts on the long-term viability of rural practice.

South Dakota's program can serve as proof that rural attorney financial incentives work. Throughout the book I reflect on ways that the South Dakota program has worked and on ways that it could do better. Yet, there may be challenges for other states that do not have the same rural-friendly coalitions existing in South Dakota leadership. South Dakota is large in square miles, but small in population. It is, after all, the kind of state where a young professor can strike up a conversation with a retired Chief Justice in the elevator of a Holiday Inn Express. In larger states, it might be harder to build the connections and coalitions that made it possible for South Dakota to create the nation's first program. The success in South Dakota, though, should inspire other states to invest in doing the same.