



SAUNDERS COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION

Saunders County, Nebraska
5th Judicial District

November 13, 2025

Nebraska Judicial Resources Commission
via E-Mail Only to: ashley.jenkins@nejudicial.gov

Re: 5th Judicial District, County Court

Dear Justice Freudenberg and Members of the Judicial Resources Commission:

On November 21, 2025, you are scheduled to consider whether the vacancy in the 5th Judicial District, County Court, created by the retirement of the Honorable C. Jo Petersen, should be filled. Please accept this letter as written testimony on behalf of the Saunders County Bar Association respectfully requesting that the Commission vote to declare a vacancy in said District.

As you are aware, the District covers 11 counties, to-wit: Boone, Butler, Colfax, Hamilton, Merrick, Nance, Platte, Polk, Saunders, Seward and York. The Saunders County Bar Association is concerned about potential delays and diminished access to the Courts with the absence of Judge Petersen—or a successor for her, to serve primarily in Butler County and Seward County. The caseload across the District continues to keep the docket busy and maintaining a fifth judge seated in Seward County is essential to adequately serve the public throughout the District and provide timely access to justice.

Although the 2025 Weighted Caseload Report indicates a calculated need of 4.57 judges for the 5th Judicial District, County Court, any reduction from five sitting judges to four would have a significant negative impact on the District's ability to manage its caseload effectively. The current workload per judge is already high at 0.91, and removing a judgeship would increase the workload ratio well beyond sustainable levels. Given the District's geographic size, the diversity of cases handled in its 11 counties, and the extensive travel already required of county court judges, maintaining five judges is vital to prevent hearing delays, ensure consistent judicial coverage and safeguard equitable access to justice in rural communities.

The 2025 Weighted Caseload Report further reflects that, without declaring a vacancy, the four remaining judges would be required to absorb Judge Petersen's caseload—totaling 56,578 weighted workload minutes (18,291 from Butler County and 38,287 from Seward County)—in addition to the associated travel demands. Seward County's workload alone ranks in the upper half of counties within the District, demonstrating the consistently high volume of cases requiring judicial attention. Failing to fill this vacancy would place an unsustainable burden on the remaining judges,

inevitably resulting in delays, increased travel inefficiencies, and diminished access to timely justice for the public served throughout the District.

For these reasons, and on behalf of the Saunders County Bar Association, we respectfully urge the Commission to determine that a vacancy exists in the 5th Judicial District, County Court, and that the seat remain in Seward County.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Catrina". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter being a large capital 'C'.

Catrina K. Harris, President
CHarris@luttonlaw.com