

# SB3500



## 104TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

### State of Illinois

2025 and 2026

SB3500

Introduced 2/5/2026, by Sen. Javier L. Cervantes

#### SYNOPSIS AS INTRODUCED:

New Act

Creates the Legal Deserts Act. Provides that, subject to appropriation, the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts may establish a program to provide grants or reimbursements to compensate an individual lawyer or law firms that relocate or open an office within a geographic area for the purpose of providing legal services to individuals residing within a legal desert. Provides that the grants or reimbursements may cover marketing expenses, compensation for an attorney or up to 2 attorneys per firm, or other eligible expenses identified by the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts.

LRB104 19720 JRC 33170 b

A BILL FOR

1 AN ACT concerning courts.

2 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,**  
3 **represented in the General Assembly:**

4 Section 1. Short title. This Act may be cited as the Legal  
5 Deserts Act.

6 Section 5. Legislative intent. The General Assembly finds  
7 that:

8 (1) The United States has more than 1.3 million  
9 lawyers, but the vast majority are concentrated in urban  
10 centers, which leaves many rural counties with few, if any  
11 lawyers. These areas are often referred to as "legal  
12 deserts".

13 (2) Residents in need of assistance with legal  
14 matters, including, but not limited to, real estate  
15 transfers, wills, family law matters, and criminal issues  
16 often face uncertainty and inability to find a local  
17 option and may turn to self-help or online tools. Online  
18 tools and artificial intelligence products offer limited  
19 personalized assistance but cannot replace the knowledge  
20 and experience of a human lawyer.

21 (3) According to the Illinois Attorney Registration  
22 and Discipline Commission, approximately 88% of Illinois  
23 lawyers are registered to practice in 6 counties (Cook,

1 DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will), with the remaining  
2 12% scattered across the remaining 96 counties. Although  
3 lawyers in private practice have traditionally served the  
4 legal needs of most individuals, currently a total of 61  
5 counties have less than 20 private practice lawyers; 46  
6 counties have less than 10 lawyers in private practice;  
7 and 4 counties have only one lawyer in private practice.  
8 Of the lawyers within those 61 counties, more than half  
9 are aged 60 or older, which means following retirement  
10 these rural areas may be left with no lawyers.

11 (4) The General Assembly finds it is necessary that  
12 all people in Illinois have access to legal services and  
13 proper representation despite geographic limitations.

14 Section 10. Definitions. As used in this Act:

15 "Geographic area" means any unit of local government as  
16 defined by the Illinois Constitution.

17 "Legal desert" means a county with fewer than 100 lawyers  
18 or any geographic area that the Supreme Court or its designee  
19 has identified as facing significant challenges in obtaining  
20 legal services due to one or more factors.

21 Section 15. Legal desert programs. Subject to  
22 appropriation, the Administrative Office of the Illinois  
23 Courts may establish a program to provide grants or  
24 reimbursements to compensate an individual lawyer or law firms

1 that relocate or open an office within a geographic area for  
2 the purpose of providing legal services to individuals  
3 residing with a legal desert. Grants or reimbursements may  
4 cover marketing expenses, compensation for an attorney or up  
5 to 2 attorneys per firm, or other eligible expenses identified  
6 by the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts. Grants  
7 provided under this Section are subject solely to the  
8 oversight of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts.