

STATE OF MONTANA

NINTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT
TOOLE, GLACIER, TETON, PONDERA COUNTIES

ROBERT G. OLSON
DISTRICT JUDGE

(406) 424-8360 OFFICE
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TOOLE COUNTY COURTHOUSE
226 1ST STREET SOUTH
P.O. Box 822
SHELBY, MT 59474

January 27, 2015

Re: House Bill 255

Dear Committee Members:

I am the sole district court judge of the Ninth Judicial District, which comprises Glacier, Pondera, Toole and Teton counties. I am writing to you in response to proposed House Bill 255, which would require judges to recuse themselves from hearing cases involving a lawyer who contributes to their campaign. I not only oppose the bill, but passage would prevent me from doing the job I was elected to do.

Most of the lawyers in my district contributed to my campaign. Many lawyers in neighboring Cascade County who practice in this district also contributed to my campaign. A low estimate would be that 75% to 80% of my cases in this district involve at least one lawyer who contributed to my campaign.

The maximum contribution is \$160 per person. No attorney is expecting to buy influence. They are merely helping a candidate he or she supports defray the costs of a campaign. In my case, campaigning in four counties cost approximately \$25,000, if memory serves me correctly. I would have never been able to run without their financial support. I suspect judges in other multi-county rural districts would have similar problems. The ramifications of a law requiring a judge to recuse himself under these circumstances would, in my opinion, bring justice to a standstill in rural Montana. It certainly would in this district.

I wish I would appear at the hearing personally, but I will be trying a felony criminal case in Toole County. I wouldn't be able to sit on that case if this bill becomes law.

If you have any questions, please advise. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Robert G. Olson".

Robert G. Olson
District Judge