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Calhoun | Genesee | Macomb | Marquette | Northeast Regional | Wexford – Missaukee

## Introduction

This report is prepared on behalf of the Michigan Holistic Defense Fellowship Board of Directors to provide insight into the strategies and trends that defined the program’s third year of law student recruitment for the upcoming 2026 Fellowship season. This report is organized into three main sections that include the recruitment strategies for this set of applicants, a demographic analysis of the students who applied and were accepted into the 2026 Law Fellow cohort, and a brief reflection on the 2026 Law Fellow recruitment strategy. A fourth section that reiterates the statistics for the accepted 2026 Law Fellow cohort in a table format is provided at the end of the report.

The data presented in this report was sourced from the required Google Form portion of the application and the finalized list of candidates who have been accepted into the 2026 Law Fellowship cohort. Requests for additional data on this cohort are welcome and should be directed to the Fellowship Director.

## 2026 Law Fellowship Advertising and Applicant Recruitment Strategies

### Direct Recruitment

Direct recruitment tactics require that an individual involved with the Fellowship (Director or Placement Site staff) partner with a particular school or networking body to present the Fellowship directly to a group of potential applicants. The Director visited and presented to law students at Michigan State University College of Law, Cooley Law School, and Wayne State University Law School.

**The presentation at Michigan State University** was a standalone event marketed to law students of all levels; this is the second year that the Fellowship has been presented to MSU law students. 57% of the Law Fellow cohort members from 2025 are current students at MSU, and those four 2025 program alumni joined the MSU presentation<sup>1</sup>. Dave Campbell (Senior Assistant Public Defender at Genesee County and site supervisor for law fellows) also joined the program alumni panel. Following the Director’s presentation, the program alumni and Dave introduced themselves and shared out a brief reflection on the Fellowship to the student audience, including what their highlights and unexpected challenges were over the course of their experience in the program. Dave spoke to his career in public defense and some of the most common rewards and misconceptions about being a public defender. Approximately 20 students attended this event.

**The presentation at Cooley Law School** was the first of its kind at Cooley and was also a standalone event marketed to law students of all levels. The Director presented without accompanying alumni or placement

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<sup>1</sup> These students include Whitney Dean, Spencer LaDue, Madison Edwards, and Jo Homoly

site staff. According to Cooley Career Services Staff, student presentation attendance was higher than average. In addition to nine student attendees, the Career Services Office staff attended. A handful of Cooley professors, including Tracey Brame, the Associate Dean and Board Chair of the Michigan Indigent Defense Commission, were also present. Student engagement with the presentation was high, and the professors and career services team were vocal advocates for both the field of indigent defense and the opportunity presented by the Fellowship.

**The presentation at Wayne State University** was provided to Dan Ellman and Athena Kheibari's mixed holistic defense seminar class of law students and social work students. One of the seven 2025 Law Fellow alumni is a current 3L student at Wayne State, and he joined the presentation (Paul Havern). The Chief Public Defender (Erin Freers-Cole) and Principal Trial Attorney (Gary Kennedy) from the Macomb County Office of the Public Defender also joined the presentation.

Following the Director's presentation, Macomb County staff reflected on their careers in law and in public defense and answered questions about working in the field, and Paul described the rewards and challenges he encountered during his summer as a fellow with the Wexford-Missaukee Placement Site. Law student engagement with the presentation was strong, and the social work students were eager to hear when the application period for 2026 Social Work Fellows would open.

### Indirect Recruitment

Indirect recruitment strategies describe the use of passive advertisements posted to online career and intern webpages intended for law students. This involves the posting of the Fellowship background and application instructions on college or university career webpages and is completed by the Director. For the 2026 Law Fellow recruitment season, the Director advertised the Fellowship on the career webpage of every accredited law school in Michigan<sup>2</sup>, Wisconsin<sup>3</sup>, Illinois<sup>4</sup>, Indiana<sup>5</sup>, and Ohio<sup>6</sup> for a total of 28 schools. This is the same list and number of schools that the 2025 Law Fellow recruitment season advertised with.

The 2026 Law Fellowship was also advertised on the National Association for Public Defense careers page and was sent to the Michigan Indigent Defense Commission careers page.

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<sup>2</sup> Cooley Law School, Michigan State University, University of Detroit Mercy, University of Michigan, Wayne State University (5)

<sup>3</sup> Marquette University, University of Wisconsin (2)

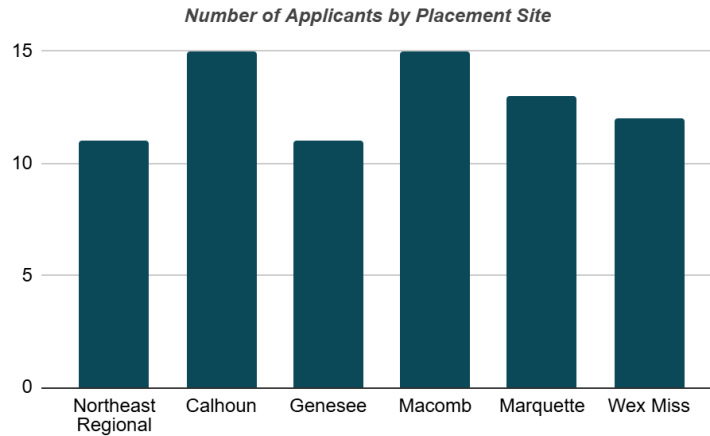
<sup>4</sup> DePaul University, Illinois Institute of Technology (Chicago-Kent), Loyola University Chicago, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Northwestern University, University of Chicago, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Northern Illinois University, University of Illinois Chicago (9)

<sup>5</sup> Indiana University Indianapolis, Indiana University Bloomington, University of Notre Dame (3)

<sup>6</sup> Ohio State University, University of Cincinnati, Case Western Reserve University, University of Dayton, Cleveland State University, University of Akron, University of Toledo, Capital University, Ohio Northern University (9)

## 2026 Law Fellowship Applicant Cohort Trends

### Number of Applicants per Placement Site



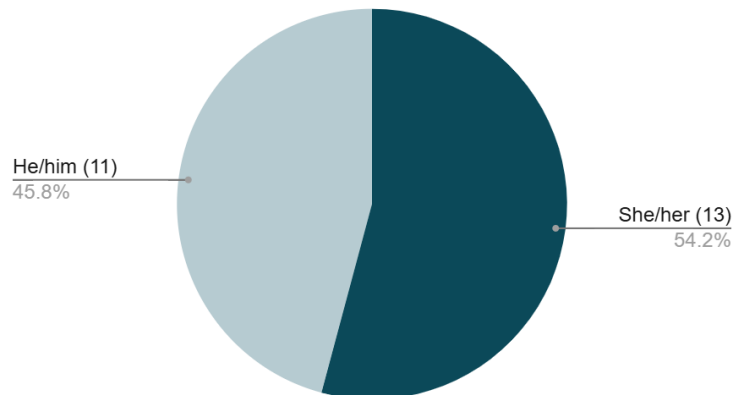
All six Placement Sites received between 11 – 15 applicants this cycle, and students were most likely to apply to the Placement Sites in Calhoun and Macomb Counties. The Director asked how many applicants each site interviewed at the November Board Meeting.

#### Of the sites who were able to join the meeting:

- Calhoun reported interviewing 6 out of 12 applicants;
- Genesee interviewed all 11 applicants;
- Macomb interviewed 8 out of 15 applicants;
- Marquette interviewed 8 out of 13 applicants; and
- Wexford Missaukee interviewed 8 or 9 out of 12 applicants and did a second round of interviews with 4 candidates.

### Applicant Pronouns

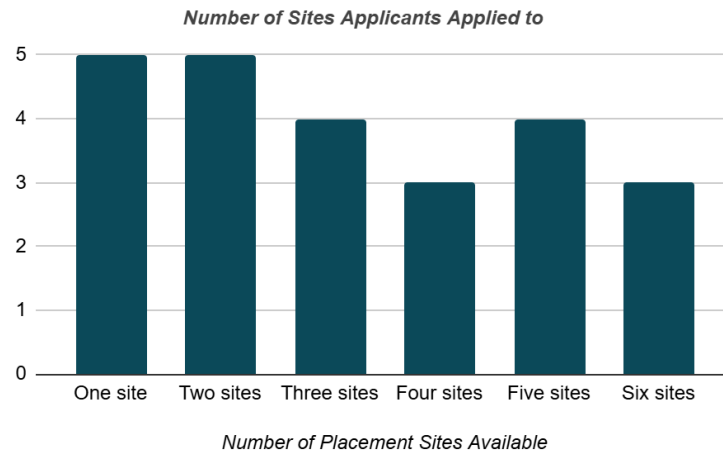
*Applicant Pronouns*



Student pronoun information is collected during the application process and is provided to placement sites in the application package to prevent the misgendering of prospective candidates during the interview process.

*In the accepted 2026 Law Fellow cohort, 66% of fellows use she/her pronouns and 33% of fellows use he/him pronouns.*

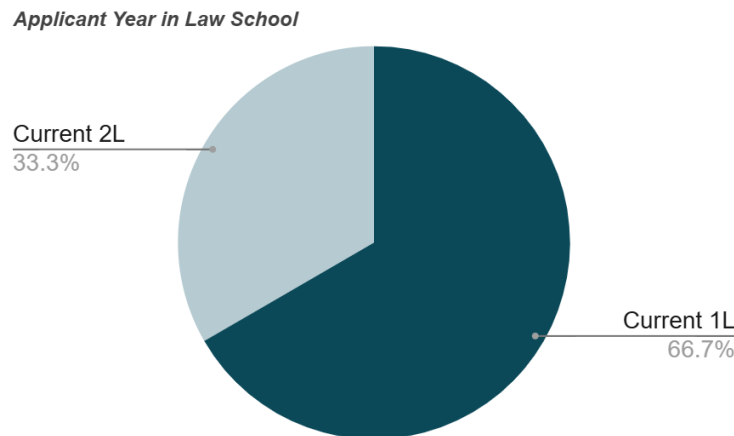
### Number of Sites Applicants Applied to



Law Fellow applicants are encouraged to apply for placement at each site that they are interested in and that they are prepared to relocate to for the summer. In the 2026 Law Fellow applicant cohort, most students applied to multiple sites. Placement Sites have historically expressed a preference to filter applicants in part by their selectivity and preference for fewer sites.

*Successful applicants who were accepted into the 2026 cohort were more likely to apply to fewer sites. 44% of accepted fellows applied to two sites, 22% applied to only one site, and 11% applied each to three sites, four, and five sites. No candidates who applied to all six sites were accepted into the 2026 cohort.*

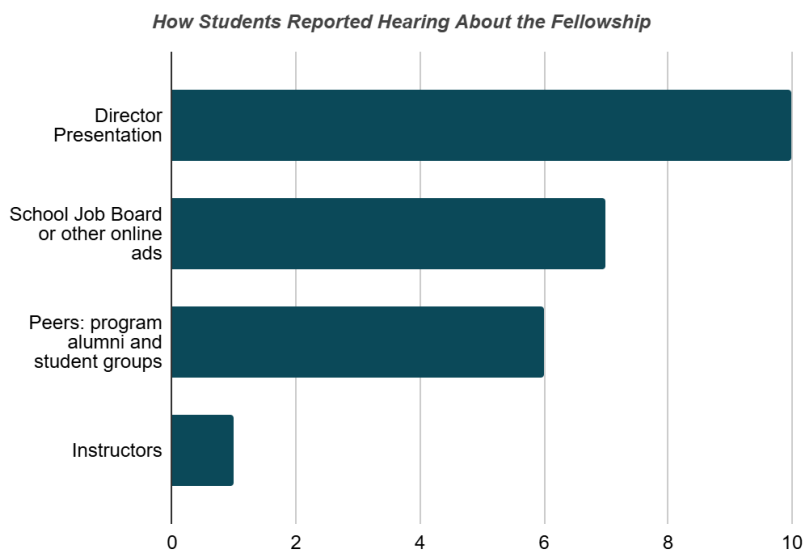
### Applicant Year in Law School



The 2026 Law Fellow applicant year in school followed the same trend established during the last two law fellow recruitment seasons: 1Ls comprise the majority of applicants. Sites have historically made placement offers to more 1L students than 2L students during the last two seasons despite the potential recruitment advantage of accepting students who are closer to graduation.

*Despite only making up one third of total applicants, current 2L students comprise two thirds of the accepted 2026 Law Fellow cohort. Several sites reported that current 2L students had a significant advantage over 1L applicants in the application process.*

### How applicants heard about the Fellowship



Applicants were required to provide a short-form answer about how they heard about the Fellowship, and the answers are grouped by theme. Applicants from this cycle reported hearing about the 2026 Law Fellowship through attending a presentation by the Director (42%), seeing the Fellowship advertised on their school’s online job board or other online search (29%), through peer word-of-mouth from program alumni and student interest groups (25%), and from their program instructors (4%).

*Two thirds of the accepted 2026 Law Fellow cohort heard about the Fellowship via an individual with a direct connection to the program; this includes a Director presentation, school peers who are Fellowship alumni, or from Dan Ellman and Athena Kheibari. The remaining third heard about the Fellowship heard about it via indirect advertisements through their school’s career platform, Google, or through their school’s criminal law society.*

### Applicants by School

School	Applicants
Michigan State University* (9)	38%
Wayne State University* (7)	29%
Northern Illinois University (2)	8%

Cooley Law School* (1)	4%
University of Chicago-Kent (1)	4%
Liberty University (1)	4%
DePaul University (1)	4%
University of Toledo (1)	4%
Marquette University (1)	4%

*\*Denotes schools where direct outreach took place*

71% of all applicants in this cycle are enrolled at schools where a Director presentation occurred. The program continues to primarily attract applicants who are enrolled in a Michigan law school. The 2025 Law Fellow application cycle saw significantly more applications from Cooley Law School and University of Detroit Mercy Law School.

*In the accepted 2026 Law Fellow cohort, 44% are enrolled at Wayne State University, 33% are at Michigan State University, 11% are at Liberty University (Virginia), and 11% are at Marquette University (Wisconsin).*

## **2026 Application Cycle Conclusions**

The 2026 Law Fellowship application cycle netted the second highest number of Law Fellowship applicants during a given season and featured the most aggressive recruitment strategy to date. There were seven fewer applicants from the 2025 application cycle; this is despite an increase in the number of Director presentations and the same number of law schools advertising the program on their career platform. One likely factor in this applicant decrease is the shortened application cycle this season. Students had 19 days to apply to the program this cycle compared to a four week window last year. This change was intended to reduce the likelihood that application offers coincided with the week of Thanksgiving, which is not worth the reduction in application numbers. Future law fellow application cycles will span the entire month of October.

The data outlined in this report will support the recruitment strategy for future Law Fellow cohorts, particularly the data that suggests Director presentations lead to a higher yield of applicants from individual law schools. Finally, the stressful trend of last-minute application submissions persists; 50% of 2026 law students applied during the last two days of the application cycle.

It will be critical to increase the number of law fellow applicants during future application seasons. The Fellowship strives to increase the number of participating Placement Sites in 2027, and more and more sites are accepting two law fellows instead of one. This ranking cycle was characterized by repetition; there were nine available law fellow positions this cycle, and yet the same names appeared across sites' top five ranked candidates.

**2026 Accepted Law Fellows Statistics (Table)**

<b>2026 At-a-Glance Accepted Law Fellow Cohort Stats</b> <i>Nine Fellows Accepted</i>	
Pronouns	66% she/her 33% he/him
Law School	44% Wayne State University 33% Michigan State University 11% Liberty University (Virginia) 11% Marquette University (Wisconsin)
Year in School (at time of application)	66% 2Ls (will be rising 3Ls as fellows) 33% 1Ls (will be rising 2Ls as fellows)
How accepted fellows heard about the program	<b>66%</b> heard about it via someone with a direct connection to the program (Director presentation, school peers who are Fellowship alumni, or Dan and Athena)  <b>33%</b> heard about it via indirect advertisements through their school’s career platform, Google, or through their school’s criminal law society
Number of placement sites applied to (out of 6)	44% applied to two sites 22% applied to only one site 11% applied to three sites 11% applied to four sites 11% applied to five sites

**A Final Fun Fact**

Thanks to Google Forms timestamp information, we know that students who applied early in the application process were significantly more likely to be accepted. 24 total students applied to the program; of the first 8 applicants to apply, 7 made it into the 2026 cohort.

The Director provides application packages to sites in one final zip file following the conclusion of the application period, *and site staff are not provided any information on when applicants apply*. There appears to be a strong correlation between students who had the capacity to apply early and those who were successful.