



## **JOINT PRESS RELEASE**

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### **FREE LEGAL ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE FOR VICTIMS OF THE VALLEY & BUTTE FIRES**

A legal aid hotline is now available for victims of the recently declared disaster areas related to the Valley Fire in Lake County and the Butte Fire in Calaveras County. The service, which allows callers to request the assistance of a lawyer, is a partnership between the State Bar of California, the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division (ABA YLD) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Disaster survivors facing legal issues who are unable to afford a lawyer may call 844-657-0479 or visit the Disaster Recovery Centers, between 9:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, to request assistance. The Valley Fire Disaster Recovery Centers are located at the Middletown Senior Center, 21256 Washington Street, Middletown; and Old Apria Health Care, 14848 Olympic Drive, Clearlake. The Butte Fire Disaster Recovery Center is at the County Government Center at 891 Mountain Ranch Road, San Andreas. Callers should identify that they are seeking disaster-related legal assistance.

The type of legal assistance available includes:

- Assistance with securing FEMA and other government benefits available to disaster victims
- Assistance with life, medical and property insurance claims
- Help with home repair contracts and contractors
- Replacement of wills and other important legal documents destroyed in the disaster
- Assisting in consumer protection matters, remedies and procedures

- Counseling on mortgage-foreclosure problems
- Counseling on landlord-tenant problems

#### Background:

When the president declares a major disaster, FEMA, in cooperation with the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division, establishes a toll-free number for disaster victims to request legal assistance. Funding for the toll-free line comes from FEMA under the authority of Section 415 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Public Law 100-707). The American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division in turn partners with state bar associations and other legal organizations to recruit volunteer lawyers in affected areas to handle victims' cases.

Victims should be aware that there are some limitations on disaster legal services. For example, assistance is not available for cases that will produce a fee (i.e., those cases where attorneys are paid part of the settlement by a court). Such cases are referred to a local lawyer referral service.

#### Partner Members:

The following organizations have joined forces to establish a toll-free phone line for Valley Fire and Butte Fire disaster victims to request free legal assistance and to provide volunteer attorneys to handle cases arising from the Valley Fire and Butte Fire devastation.

**American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division** ([www.americanbar.org](http://www.americanbar.org)) – The ABA YLD is the largest national organization of young lawyers, provides leadership in serving the public and the profession, and promotes excellence and fulfillment in the practice of law. Its parent organization, the ABA, is the national voice of the legal profession and the largest voluntary professional membership group in the world.

**State Bar of California** ([www.calbar.org](http://www.calbar.org)) – The State Bar of California was created by the state legislature in 1927, as a public corporation within the judicial branch of government. The State Bar regulates admission to the Bar and the professional conduct of California lawyers, and works to provide greater access to legal services.

**Northern California Lawyer Access** ([www.norcallawyer.org](http://www.norcallawyer.org)) – NCLA serves the 20 northernmost counties of California, and refers individuals and businesses to qualified, insured lawyers in their geographic area. Through their Law Practice Academy, they serve clients who need low-cost legal help. Academy lawyers also provide some pro bono legal services.

**Legal Services of Northern California** ([www.lsn.net](http://www.lsn.net)) – Legal Services of Northern California provides free legal services to low-income residents of the 23 counties that comprise northernmost California, through nine regional offices. Their priority service areas include support for families, housing preservation, enhancing economic stability, family safety and stability, health care and civil rights.

**Bay Area Legal Aid** ([www.BayLegal.org](http://www.BayLegal.org)) – Bay Area Legal Aid is the largest provider of free civil legal services to low-income residents of the San Francisco Bay Area, with six regional offices serving seven counties. BayLegal provides legal services in housing preservation, domestic violence and sexual assault prevention, economic security, consumer protection and health-care access.