

PRESS RELEASE

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Free Legal Assistance Available for Victims of Flooding and Mudslides

Partnership between West Virginia legal organizations, ABA and FEMA helps residents

CHARLESTON, July 12, 2010 — A toll-free legal aid hotline is now available for victims of recent severe storms, flooding, mudslides and landslides in West Virginia. The service, which allows callers to request the assistance of a lawyer, is a partnership between the West Virginia State Bar, Legal Aid of West Virginia, the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Victims facing legal issues who are unable to afford a lawyer may call **(877) 331-4259** between the hours of 9 a.m. – noon and 1 – 4 p.m. to request assistance. Messages can be left at any time. Callers should identify that they are seeking disaster-related legal assistance. Victims who qualify for assistance will be matched with local volunteer lawyers who will provide *pro bono* legal assistance.

The type of legal assistance available includes:

- Securing Federal Emergency Management Agency and related government benefits
- 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
- Assistance with other legal problems related to the disaster

Victims should be aware that there are 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 the court). Such cases are referred to a local lawyer referral service. To determine whether an issue qualifies for free legal assistance, individuals should call (877) 331-4259 for more information.

Background

When the U.S. 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.

Partnership Members

The following organizations have joined forces to establish a toll-free phone line for West Virginia disaster victims to request free legal assistance, and to provide volunteer attorneys to handle cases arising from the recent disaster.

American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division – The American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division is the home for young lawyers. With more than 150,000 members and 300 affiliated groups, the ABA YLD is the largest young lawyer organization in the world.

Federal Emergency Management Agency – FEMA coordinates the federal government's role in preparing for, preventing, mitigating the effects of, responding to, and recovering from all domestic disasters, whether natural or man-made, including acts of terror. Through an agreement with the American Bar Association, FEMA underwrites the cost of operating toll free legal assistance lines for victims in areas designated as federal disaster sites.

Legal Aid of West Virginia – In 2002, Legal Aid of West Virginia was formed through the merger of Appalachian Legal Services and West Virginia Legal Services Plan, to form the single statewide federally-funded entity which has since been called Legal Aid of West Virginia (LAWV). Through 14 offices across the state, LAWV serves over 20,000 families and individuals each year. The organization is led by its Executive Director and a volunteer Board of Directors comprised of attorneys and lay people from across the state, in its mission to provide free advocacy services to West Virginians by handling civil legal problems for low income people, serving domestic violence victims regardless of income, assisting long-term care residents and their families, and providing services to individuals living with behavioral health challenges. To learn more about this organization, or its programs and services, visit their website at: www.lawv.net.

West Virginia State Bar –The West Virginia State Bar is the largest professional association in West Virginia with nearly 10,000 members. Founded in 1881, the WWSB provides opportunities for continuing legal education, professional development and public service.