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LEGAL SERVICES**



**LEGAL AID of ARKANSAS**  
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## **JOINT PRESS RELEASE**

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## **FREE LEGAL ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE FOR ARKANSAS STORM SURVIVORS**

**June 30, 2017** – As a result of the recent severe storms and tornadoes in Arkansas, the Arkansas Bar Association and the Young Lawyers' Section, in conjunction with FEMA, the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division, the Center for Arkansas Legal Services, and Legal Aid of Arkansas, Red Cross, and the Arkansas VOAD, is providing free disaster legal assistance efforts to individuals that were affected by the recent storms in **Benton, Boone, Carroll, Faulkner, Fulton, Jackson, Lee, Lawrence, Pulaski, Randolph, Saline, Washington, and Yell Counties**. On June 28, 2017, per the request of the Governor's Authorized Representative for the State of Arkansas, the following counties were added: **Prairie, White, and Woodruff**. Free disaster legal assistance is now being provided for

individuals who are affected by the severe storms, tornadoes, straight-line winds, and flooding which occurred in the state beginning April 26, 2017 through May 19, 2017. The number for the Young Lawyers Division Disaster Legal Assistance is **501-801-5664** and storm survivors may now call the hotline. Local legal aid providers and pro bono attorneys will be available to help with the following:

- Assistance 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;
- Help with employment matters;
- Replacement of wills and other important legal documents lost or destroyed in the disaster;
- Consumer protections such as price-gouging and avoiding contractor scams in the rebuilding process;
- Counseling on mortgage-foreclosure problems; and
- Counseling on landlord-tenant problems.

Storm survivors may call the number, leave a message identifying the need for disaster assistance, and a volunteer attorney will return the call to answer their legal questions. The goal is to assist as many individuals affected by the storms as possible.

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### **Major Disaster Declaration**

On June 15, 2017, The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) announced that federal disaster assistance has been made available to the State of Arkansas to supplement state, tribal and local recovery efforts in the area affected by severe storms, tornadoes, straight-line winds, and flooding during the period of April 26, 2017 through May 19, 2017. The President's action makes federal funding available to affected individuals in **Benton, Boone, Carroll, Faulkner, Fulton, Jackson, Lee, Lawrence, Prairie, Pulaski, Randolph, Saline, Washington, White, Woodruff and Yell Counties**. Arkansans who sustained property damage as a result of the severe storms, tornadoes, straight-line winds, and flooding are urged to register with FEMA, as they may be eligible for federal and state disaster assistance. People who sustained storm damage in the affected counties above can register for FEMA assistance online at [www.DisasterAssistance.gov](http://www.DisasterAssistance.gov) or via smartphone or Web-enabled device at [m.fema.gov](http://m.fema.gov). Applicants may also call 800-621-FEMA (3362) or 1-800-462-7585 (TTY) from 7 am to 10 pm daily. Applicants should be prepared to provide basic information about themselves (name, permanent address and phone number), insurance coverage and any other information to help substantiate the loss. In addition, there is information available at [www.DisasterLegalAid.org](http://www.DisasterLegalAid.org).

### **Beware of Fraud**

Both FEMA and the Arkansas Attorney General's Office urge Arkansans to be aware of the risk of fraud and common scams in the wake of severe weather. Common post-disaster fraud practices include phony housing inspectors, fraudulent building contractors, bogus pleas for disaster donations, and fake offers of state or federal aid. Arkansans are urged to ask questions and to require identification when someone claims to represent a government agency.

Affected individuals should also keep in mind that state and federal workers never ask for or accept money

and always carry identification badges with a photograph. There is no fee required to apply for or to receive disaster assistance from FEMA, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), or the State. Additionally, no state or federal government disaster assistance agency will call to ask for your financial account information. Unless you place a call to the agency yourself, you should not provide personal information over the phone as it can lead to identity theft.

Those who suspect fraud can call the FEMA Disaster Fraud Hotline at 866-720-5721 (toll free). Complaints may also be made to local law enforcement.

### **Background**

When the U.S. President declares a major disaster, FEMA, in cooperation with the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division, establishes a number for disaster survivors to request legal assistance. Funding for the 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 joins with state bar associations and other legal organizations to recruit volunteer lawyers in affected areas to handle survivors' cases. In this instance, there will be no additional expense for the federal government, because the State Bar Association is offering use of its existing line. However, 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 the court).

### **Partnership Members**

The following organizations have joined forces to support a phone line for Arkansas storm survivors to request free legal assistance, and to provide volunteer attorneys to handle cases arising from recent storm damage.

American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division - The ABA YLD, 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 one of the largest voluntary professional membership groups 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

The Arkansas Bar Association – ([www.arkbar.com](http://www.arkbar.com)) The Arkansas Bar Association is a voluntary, statewide organization with 5,700 members. Among its purposes are the advancement of the administration of justice and the fostering among its members of high ideals of integrity, learning and public service.

National Disaster Legal Aid Online – (<http://www.disasterlegalaid.org/>) NDLA is a collaborative effort of Lone Star Legal Aid, the American Bar Association, the Legal Services Corporation, the National Legal Aid and Defender Association, and Pro Bono Net.

Center for Arkansas Legal Services and Legal Aid of Arkansas – are non-profit organizations that provide free legal services to low-income Arkansans with civil legal problems, including eviction and foreclosure defense, consumer issues, housing, help for victims of domestic abuse, and representation in public benefits. With 17 offices staffed by more than 50 attorneys throughout the state, plus a volunteer pool of more than 1,400 attorneys, legal aid services benefit more than 30,000 low-income Arkansans with their critical legal needs annually. Learn more at [www.arlegalservices.org](http://www.arlegalservices.org).