



The State Bar  
of California

## JOINT PRESS RELEASE (FEMA DR-4407)

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### FREE LEGAL ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE FOR CALIFORNIA WILDFIRE SURVIVORS

November 14, 2018 — A legal hotline is now available for survivors of the wildfires in California in **Butte, Ventura, and Los Angeles** Counties (additional counties may be added). Disaster survivors facing legal issues in **Butte County** related to the fires and who are unable to afford a lawyer may call the hotline at **1-800-345-9491**. Disaster survivors facing legal issues in **Ventura or Los Angeles County** related to the fires and who are unable to afford a lawyer may call the Ventura county hotline at **1-877-301-4448** or the Los Angeles County hotline at **1-800-870-0732**. Hours are 8:30am to 5:30pm, Monday-Friday. Callers may also leave message.

The service, which allows callers to receive limited legal assistance from a volunteer lawyer, is a partnership between the Ventura County Legal Aid; State Bar of California; the Santa Barbara and Ventura Colleges of Law; Legal Services of Northern California, the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division (ABA YLD); and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The type of legal assistance available includes:

- Assistance with securing FEMA and other government benefits available to disaster survivors;
- 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 and foreclosure problems;
- Counseling on landlord-tenant problems.

Survivors should be aware that there are some limitations on disaster legal services. For example, assistance is not available for fee generating cases (cases that will produce a monetary award). These matters are referred through the [State Bar of California certified lawyer referral service in your area](#).

### **Major Disaster Declaration**

On November 12, 2018, a Major Disaster Declaration was issued for the state of California making federal funding available to individuals and business owners in Butte, Ventura, and Los Angeles Counties. To register with FEMA, and if eligible, apply for federal and state disaster assistance, register online at [DisasterAssistance.gov](#) or via smartphone or Web-enabled device at [m.fema.gov](#). Applicants may also call 800-621-3362 or 800-462-7585 (TTY) seven days a week from 4:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Pacific Time. Applicants should be prepared to provide basic information about themselves, insurance coverage, and any other information to help substantiate the loss.

Please note that if you are eligible for an Individual Assistance grant you are not required to pay back the grant to FEMA. There is no income threshold for Individual Assistance grants, but you may be referred to the Small Business Administration (SBA) for a low interest disaster loan to assist in your recovery. These low interest disaster loans for homeowners and businesses from the SBA must be repaid.

In addition, there is information available at:

[www.LawHelpCA.org](#) – This statewide website, hosted by the Legal Aid Association of California, provides information about common legal issues in addition to disaster relief information. It also has an updated directory of pre-screened organizations that offer free or low-cost legal advice and representation.

[www.disasterlegalaid.org](#) – This national website, a collaborative effort of Lone Star Legal Aid, the American Bar Association, the Legal Services Corporation, the National Legal Aid and Defender Association, the Texas Legal Services Center and Pro Bono Net, provides information on legal issues related to disasters to the low and moderate income public.

<http://www.calbar.ca.gov/Public/Need-Legal-Help/Free-Legal-Help/Legal-Help-After-Disaster> - The State Bar of California (State Bar) has legal information available and resources available to the public. The State Bar has also issued a [legal fraud alert](#) to consumers.

[www.uphelp.org](#) – United Policyholders (UP) is a national nonprofit 501(c)(3) consumer advocacy group that specializes in helping disaster survivors with insurance claim issues. UP also trains case managers and legal aid lawyers to assist clients with insurance and recovery matters, and for help with flood, wind, hurricane and auto insurance questions.

### **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 survivors 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 bars, local bar associations and other legal organizations to recruit volunteer lawyers in affected areas to handle survivors' cases.

### **Hotline Partner Members**

The following organizations have joined forces to establish a hotline for fire and mudslide survivors to request free legal assistance, and to provide coordination for volunteer attorneys.

[American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division](#) – 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.

[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.

[Ventura County Legal Aid](#) - Since its foundation in 1996, VCLA has provided no-cost services and representation to thousands of Ventura County Residents. VCLA looks forward to using its experience from the Thomas Fire Legal Assistance Hotline to provide real life answers and services to the victims of the 2018 Hill and Woolsey fires. VCLA hopes to simplify recovery efforts and legal access, while simultaneously adhering to our core mission: equal access to justice for residents of Ventura County.

[Santa Barbara and Ventura Colleges of Law](#) - Established in 1969, The Santa Barbara & Ventura Colleges of Law (COL) was founded as a nonprofit to expand opportunities and broaden access to legal education. COL is dedicated to a student-centered approach that affords students of diverse backgrounds the opportunity to pursue careers in law or legal-related fields.

[State Bar of California](#) – The State Bar of California’s mission is to protect the public and includes the primary functions of licensing, regulation and discipline of attorneys; the advancement of the ethical and competent practice of law; and support of efforts for greater access to, and inclusion in, the legal system.

[Legal Services of Northern California](#) – LSNC’s mission is to provide quality legal services to empower the poor to identify and defeat the causes and effects of poverty within our community, efficiently utilizing all available resources. (<https://lsnc.net>)