



VCLA, INC.

## JOINT PRESS RELEASE

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### FREE LEGAL ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE FOR CALIFORNIA FIRE AND MUDSLIDE SURVIVORS

VENTURA COUNTY, January 18, 2018 — A legal hotline is now available for survivors of the fires and mudslides in California in **Los Angeles, San Diego, Santa Barbara,** and **Ventura** Counties (additional counties may be added). Disaster survivors facing legal issues related to the fires and who are unable to afford a lawyer may call the hotline at **877-301-4448**. Hours are 8:30am to 5:30pm, Monday-Friday. Callers may also leave a message.

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

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 January 2, 2018, a Major Disaster Declaration was issued for the state of California, and amended on January 15, 2018, making federal funding available to individuals and business owners in Los Angeles, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Ventura 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.

[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.

Legal Aid Foundation of Santa Barbara County (LAFSBC)—LAFSBC is a non-profit law firm that assists residents of Santa Barbara County who cannot afford a lawyer with critical civil legal issues. LAFSBC assists residents with landlord-tenant issues, fair housing issues, elder abuse and financial exploitation, family violence prevention, financial fraud and illegal debt collection issues, and mortgage foreclosure issues. LAFSBC also staffs a self-help clinic for civil legal problems for all county residents regardless of income.

Ventura County Bar Association - The Ventura County Bar Association (VCBA) was established in 1929 and incorporated in 1968 as a California non-profit 501(c)(6) Mutual Benefit Corporation. Currently, the VCBA has 1227 members and 37 sections, committees and affiliates. The VCBA is governed by a 28 member board of directors, and operated by a devoted staff of 7 professionals. The Ventura County Bar Association/Volunteer Lawyers Services Program, Inc. (VLSP) provides legal services for low income individuals and families in Ventura County. VLSP, Inc. was incorporated as a non-profit in December 2001, and in June 2002 became a 501(c)(3) public benefit, tax exempt corporation.

Ventura County Legal Aid - VCLA, formerly known as Volunteer Lawyer Services Program/Ventura County Bar Association, Inc., was formed in 1996. Since that time, VCLA has provided low-cost and no-cost representation to thousands of Ventura County residents. VCLA is supported solely through private donations and the volunteerism of members of the Ventura County Bar Association. VCLA is a non-profit charitable organization, and all donations are fully deductible in accordance with applicable tax law.

[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.