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## JOINT PRESS RELEASE

### Free Legal Assistance Available for Missouri Flood Survivors

**June 7, 2017** – A toll-free legal help hotline is available for those impacted by the recent storms and flooding in Missouri. The service, launched May 2, allows callers to request the assistance of a lawyer and is a partnership between The Missouri Bar, the Mid-Missouri Legal Services Corporation, Legal Services of Eastern Missouri, Legal Services of Southern Missouri, Legal Services of Western Missouri, the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

A toll-free Disaster Recovery Legal Assistance Hotline (**800-829-4128**) is available to connect individuals affected by the recent disasters with volunteer lawyers and local legal aid providers who can help with:

- 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;
- Replacement of wills and other important legal documents lost or destroyed in the disaster;
- Consumer protection issues such as price-gouging and avoiding contractor scams in the rebuilding process;
- Counseling on mortgage-foreclosure problems; and
- Counseling on landlord-tenant problems

The hotline is available 24/7 and callers can leave a message any time. Individuals who qualify for assistance will be matched with Missouri lawyers who have volunteered to provide free, limited legal help.

Callers should be aware that there are some limitations on disaster legal services. For example, Callers who need representation in court or who have issues requiring fee-generating services will be referred to the appropriate services.

#### **Major Disaster Declaration**

A total of 26 counties received the declaration June 2, 2017:

- Osage
- Franklin
- Jefferson
- St. Louis
- St. Louis City
- Maries
- Phelps
- Pulaski
- Texas
- Shannon
- Howell
- Douglas
- Ozark
- Taney
- Stoney
- Ripley
- Carter
- Reynolds
- Butler
- Dunklin
- Pemiscot
- Bollinger
- Madison
- Jasper

- Newton

- McDonald

People who sustained property damage as a result of the severe storms and flooding are urged to register with FEMA, as they may be eligible for federal and state disaster assistance. People can register online at [DisasterAssistance.gov](https://DisasterAssistance.gov) or via smartphone or Web-enabled device at [m.fema.gov](https://m.fema.gov). Applicants may also call 800-621-3362 or 800-462-7585 (TTY) from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week. Flood survivors are also encouraged to call the FEMA hotline to report their damage.

Low-interest disaster loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) are available for eligible applicants. SBA helps businesses of all sizes (including landlords), private nonprofit organizations, homeowners, and renters fund repairs or rebuilding efforts and cover the cost of replacing lost or damaged personal property. Disaster loans cover losses not fully compensated by insurance or other recoveries.

For more information, individuals may contact SBA's Disaster Assistance Customer Service Center by calling 800-659-2955, emailing [disastercustomerservice@sba.gov](mailto:disastercustomerservice@sba.gov), or visiting SBA's website at [disasterloan.sba.gov/ela](https://disasterloan.sba.gov/ela). Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals may call 800-877-8339.

For more information on Missouri recovery, visit the disaster Web page at <https://recovery.mo.gov/>.

### **Beware of Fraud**

The risk of fraud and scams is high in the wake of the 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. Missourians are urged to ask questions, and to require identification when someone claims to represent a government agency.

Survivors 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 agencies.

### **Partnership Members**

The following organizations have joined forces to provide a toll-free phone line for Missouri disaster survivors to request free legal assistance and to connect with volunteer lawyers to handle cases arising from the recent severe weather and flooding:

*The Missouri Bar* ([mobar.org](https://mobar.org) and [MissouriLawyersHelp.org](https://MissouriLawyersHelp.org)) – The Missouri Bar is a statewide organization that is dedicated to improving the legal profession, the law and the administration of justice for all Missourians. Created in 1944 by order of the Supreme Court of Missouri, it serves all 30,000 of Missouri's practicing lawyers. The Missouri Bar provides a wide range of services and resources to its members, as well as the media, educators and the citizens of Missouri.

*American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division* ([americanbar.org](https://americanbar.org)) - 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 the largest voluntary professional membership group in the world.

*Federal Emergency Management Agency* ([fema.gov](https://fema.gov)) - 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 ABA, FEMA underwrites the cost of operating toll-free legal assistance lines for victims in areas designated as federal disaster sites.

*National Disaster Legal Aid Online* ([disasterlegallaid.org](https://disasterlegallaid.org)) – NDLA is a collaborative effort of Missouri Legal Aid, the American Bar Association, the Legal Services Corporation, the National Legal Aid and Defender Association, and Pro Bono Net.

*United Policyholders* ([www.uphelp.org](https://www.uphelp.org)) – United Policyholders is a non-profit voice and information resource for insurance consumers with expertise in assisting victims with flood insurance claims.

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