



## JOINT PRESS RELEASE

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### **FEMA and ABA YLD Join Legal Hotline Partnership** *National groups will provide funding for disaster legal services*

NASHVILLE, May 18, 2010 — A toll-free legal assistance line for victims of recent storms and flooding, established earlier this month, is now being supported by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division (ABA YLD). FEMA and the ABA YLD join a partnership of nine Tennessee legal organizations that launched the hotline on May 6.

The service, which allows callers to request the assistance of a lawyer, is available from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. central time Monday through Friday. Victims facing legal issues should call (888) 395-9297 to request assistance. Messages can be left at any time. Callers will be matched with Tennessee lawyers who have volunteered to provide free legal help.

The type of legal assistance available through the hotline or the centers includes:

- \* Securing government benefits available to disaster victims
- \* Filing life, medical and property insurance claims
- \* Dealing with home repair contracts and contractors
- \* Replacing missing or destroyed wills and other legal documents
- \* Dealing with consumer protection matters, remedies and procedures
- \* Counseling on mortgage-foreclosure problems
- \* Counseling on landlord/tenant problems

#### **FEMA CENTERS**

FEMA has opened or plans to open 26 disaster recovery centers in Tennessee, as well as deploy six traveling teams in Middle and West Tennessee. Download a list of the centers at [http://www.tba.org/pressroom/releases\\_2010/femacenters.pdf](http://www.tba.org/pressroom/releases_2010/femacenters.pdf)

At this time, no lawyers are scheduled to be on site at the centers, but the TBA is working with FEMA to identify any needs that might arise for legal representatives to be placed at the locations. The disaster information centers set up by the Nashville and Metro Davidson County Government, where lawyers had been on hand to answer questions, are now closed and their functions transferred to the FEMA centers.

## **BACKGROUND**

When the U.S. President declares a major disaster, FEMA, in cooperation with the ABA YLD, provides funding for a toll-free hotline that disaster victims may use to request legal assistance. 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.

On May 13, FEMA authorized a Disaster Legal Services Program for the counties in Tennessee that have been designated as federal disaster areas.

Prospective clients 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). Such cases are referred to a local lawyer referral service. In Nashville, the Nashville Bar Association has agreed to handle these cases at no cost.

## **DISASTER DESIGNATIONS**

To date, 42 counties in Tennessee have been designated as federal disaster areas.

In Middle Tennessee they are: Cheatham, Davidson, DeKalb, Dickson, Hickman, Humphreys, Lawrence, Lewis, Macon, Maury, Montgomery, Perry, Robertson, Rutherford, Smith, Stewart, Sumner, Trousdale, Wayne, Williamson and Wilson counties.

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In West Tennessee they are: Benton, Carroll, Chester, Crockett, Decatur, Dyer, Fayette, Gibson, Hardeman, Hardin, Haywood, Henderson, Houston, Jackson, Lauderdale, McNairy, Madison, Obion, Shelby and Tipton counties.

## **VOLUNTEER LAWYERS**

Lawyers around the state who are willing to handle flood-related cases on a pro bono basis are encouraged to sign up at <http://www.tba.org/volunteer>. Resources to help lawyers answer disaster questions also are available on the site. One of the most requested resources is the Disaster Legal Services Manual developed by the TBA Young Lawyers Division. It is available for download at [http://www.tba.org/YLD/disaster\\_manual.pdf](http://www.tba.org/YLD/disaster_manual.pdf). A free one-hour web cast highlighting resources available in the manual can be accessed at [https://www.tnbaru.com/CLE/catalog\\_course\\_details.php?course=6348](https://www.tnbaru.com/CLE/catalog_course_details.php?course=6348). A free one-hour web cast on how to file or appeal a FEMA claim is available at [https://www.tnbaru.com/CLE/catalog\\_course\\_details.php?course=6357](https://www.tnbaru.com/CLE/catalog_course_details.php?course=6357)

## **MORE INFORMATION**

Those in need of additional information about legal services can visit the TBA website at <http://www.tba.org/volunteer> for an updated list of clinics and other resources.

## **PARTNERSHIP MEMBERS**

The following 11 organizations have joined forces to establish a toll-free phone line for Tennessee flood victims to request free legal assistance, and to provide volunteer attorneys to handle cases arising from recent storm damage.

**American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division (ABA YLD)** – The ABA YLD, the largest national organization of young lawyers, provides leadership in serving the public and the profession, and promoting 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. Learn more about the ABA YLD's disaster legal assistance activities at [http://www.abanet.org/disaster/legal\\_assistance.html](http://www.abanet.org/disaster/legal_assistance.html)

**Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)** – 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. Visit the agency online at <http://www.fema.gov>

**Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland (LAS)** – LAS was founded in 1968 as Legal Services of Nashville by eight members of the Nashville Bar Association. It has since expanded and consolidated with other organizations to help low-income people in 48 counties through eight offices. The organization focuses on individual cases and community education, and serves over 7,000 people each year. Legal Aid Society's mission is to enforce, advance and defend the legal rights of low-income and vulnerable families in order to obtain for them the basic necessities of life. The Legal Aid Society also houses and directs the Nashville Pro Bono Program, many of whose members also will be available to provide legal help to disaster victims. For more information contact LAS at (615) 244-6610 or visit the agency online at <http://www.las.org>.

**Memphis Bar Association (MBA)** – Established in 1874, the Memphis Bar Association (MBA) is a voluntary association of attorneys and judges upholding high standards of integrity in the legal profession through continuing professional education, supporting legal services to all in the community, and educating the public about law and the administration of justice. In 2008, the MBA debuted [legalservices.memphisbar.org](http://legalservices.memphisbar.org), a website dedicated to assisting the people of Memphis & Shelby County, Tenn. For more information contact the MBA at (901) 527-3573 or visit the association online at <http://www.memphisbar.org>.

**Memphis Area Legal Services (MALS)** – Since 1970, MALS has been committed to equal justice for all people, helping children, families and individuals solve problems that affect their basic needs. MALS serves nearly 8,000 people in distress each year. Its service area includes Fayette, Lauderdale, Shelby and Tipton counties. For more information contact (901) 523-8822 or visit the agency's website at <http://www.malsi.org>.

**Nashville Bar Association (NBA)** – The Nashville Bar Association, established in 1831, is a professional organization serving the legal community of Nashville, Tennessee. The mission of the Nashville Bar Association is to improve the practice of law through Education, Service, and Fellowship. The NBA, with nearly 3,000 members, is the largest metropolitan bar association in Tennessee. The NBA helps its members stay informed through its award-winning publication, the *Nashville Bar Journal*, that provides essential information such as views from the bench, legal developments and legislative updates, continuing legal education schedules, and announcements and reviews of NBA events. Members also have 24-hour access to NBA information and other legal

resources at our website and receive periodic electronic communications to keep them informed. For more information contact (615) 242-9272 or visit the association's website at <http://www.nashvillebar.org>.

**Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services (TALS)** – TALS is a statewide non-profit organization that seeks to build partnerships to support the delivery of effective civil legal services to low-income and elderly Tennesseans. TALS is committed to increasing equal access to justice across Tennessee. For more information contact (615) 627-0956 or visit the alliance online at <http://www.tals.org>.

**Tennessee Association for Justice (TAJ)** – The TAJ is a member organization comprised primarily of plaintiff attorneys from across the state. Through advocacy and education, TAJ works to protect the civil justice system and ensure that every citizen has access to justice. For more information visit <http://www.tnaj.org> or call (615) 329-3000.

**Tennessee Justice Center (TJC)** – The TJC is a non-profit public interest law and advocacy firm serving Tennessee's families. It gives priority to policy issues and civil cases in which the most basic necessities of life are at stake and where advocacy can benefit needy families statewide. TJC works to empower its clients by holding government accountable for its policies and actions. TJC was established in 1996 and is located at 301 Charlotte Avenue, Nashville, TN. For additional information about the Tennessee Justice Center and its services visit <http://www.tnjustice.org> or call (615) 255-0331.

**Tennessee Bar Association (TBA)** – The TBA is the largest professional association in Tennessee with over 10,000 members. Founded in 1881, the TBA provides opportunities for continuing legal education, professional development and public service. The TBA's dedication to serving the state's legal community is evidenced by its membership roll, which represents the entire spectrum of legal practice: plaintiff and defense lawyers, corporate counsel, judges, prosecutors, public defenders, government lawyers and legal services attorneys. Its Young Lawyers Division, comprised of lawyers in their first five years of practice or under 36 years of age, is dedicated to serving the public and the profession as the "service arm of the bar." For more information about the TBA call (615) 383-7421 or visit the association's website at <http://www.tba.org>.

**West Tennessee Legal Services, Inc. (WTLS)** – WTLS is a non-profit organization that provides assistance in civil cases to individuals, families and communities. It services 17 West Tennessee counties including Benton, Carroll, Chester, Crockett, Dyer, Decatur, Gibson, Hardeman, Hardin, Haywood, Henry, Henderson, Lake, McNairy, Madison, Obion and Weakley. For more information call (731) 423-0616 or visit the agency's website at <http://www.wtls.org>.