



JOINT PRESS RELEASE

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Free Legal Assistance Available for Disaster Victims
Partnership between Arkansas legal organizations, American Bar Association
and FEMA assists residents in need

LITTLE ROCK, MAY 20, 2011 - A toll-free legal aid hotline is now available for victims of the state's counties recently declared disaster areas - Benton, Boone, Clay, Crittenden, Cross, Faulkner, Garland, Greene, Independence, Jackson, Jefferson, Lawrence, Lincoln, Lonoke, Madison, Mississippi, Monroe, Montgomery, Phillips, Prairie, Pulaski, Randolph, Saline, Washington, White, and Woodruff counties. The service, which allows callers to request the assistance of a lawyer, is a partnership between the Arkansas Bar Association and its Young Lawyers Section, the Arkansas Legal Services Partnership (Center for Arkansas Legal Services and Legal Aid of Arkansas), the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Victims facing legal issues who are unable to afford a lawyer can call **1-877-434-4084** to request assistance. Messages can be left at any time. Callers should identify that they are seeking disaster-related legal assistance. Individuals who qualify will be matched with Arkansas lawyers who have volunteered to provide their services.

The type of legal assistance available includes:

- Assistance with 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 destroyed or lost in the disaster
- Assistance with consumer protection matters, remedies and procedures

- Counseling on mortgage-foreclosure problems
- Counseling on landlord-tenant problems

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 victims 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 bar associations and other legal organizations to recruit volunteer lawyers in affected areas to handle victims' cases.

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). Such cases are referred to a local lawyer referral service.

Partnership Members

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

American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division -

(http://www.americanbar.org/groups/young_lawyers.html) - The American Bar Association 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. The American Bar Association is the national voice of the legal profession and the largest voluntary professional membership group in the world.

Arkansas Bar Association (www.arkbar.com) - The Arkansas Bar Association is a voluntary, statewide organization with over 5,000 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.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (www.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 American Bar Association, FEMA underwrites the cost of operating toll-free legal assistance hotlines for victims in areas designated as federal disaster sites.

Arkansas Legal Services Partnership (www.arlegalservices.org) - ALSP is a statewide collaboration between Legal Aid of Arkansas (LAA) and the Center for Arkansas Legal Services (CALs). Together, LAA and CALs provide free civil legal assistance to low-income residents throughout Arkansas.

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