

Press Release



Contact:

Attorney Alyesha P. Asghar
ABA YLD District 18 Representative
Tel. 304-340-3871
aasghar@spilmanlaw.com

Free Legal Assistance Available for Storm Survivors Partnership between ABA, Legal Aid of West Virginia and FEMA helps residents

October 2, 2012 – A toll-free legal aid line is taking calls from survivors of this summer's derecho in designated West Virginia counties. These counties are Barbour, Boone, Braxton, Cabell, Calhoun, Clay, Doddridge, Fayette, Gilmer, Grant, Greenbrier, Hardy, Harrison, Jackson, Jefferson, Kanawha, Lewis, Lincoln, Logan, Marshall, Mason, McDowell, Mercer, Mingo, Monroe, Nicholas, Pendleton, Pleasants, Pocahontas, Preston, Putnam, Raleigh, Randolph, Ritchie, Roane, Summers, Tucker, Tyler, Upshur, Wayne, Webster, Wetzel, Wirt, Wood and Wyoming. Additional designations may be made at a later date if requested by the state and warranted by the results of further damage assessments. The service, which allows callers to request the assistance of a lawyer, is a partnership between the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division, Legal Aid of West Virginia and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Survivors facing legal issues may call **877-331-4259** 24 hours a day to the message line to request assistance. Phone lines are staffed during the hours of 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and callers may leave a message after those times. **Callers should identify that they are seeking FEMA legal assistance, and should identify what county they are located in.** Survivors who qualify for assistance will be matched with West Virginia lawyers who have volunteered to provide free legal help.

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-foreclosure problems
- Counseling on landlord/tenant problems

Background

When the U.S. 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 bar associations and other legal organizations to recruit volunteer lawyers in affected areas to handle survivors' cases.

Survivors 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. To determine whether an issue qualifies for free legal assistance, individuals should call **877-331-4259** and report that they are seeking assistance relative to the declared FEMA disaster. Callers will provide information to staff and an attorney will contact the caller after reviewing the information provided by the caller.

Local Press Contacts

For more information about disaster legal aid, please contact:

Attorney Alyesha P. Asghar
ABA YLD District 18 Representative
Tel. 304-340-3871
aasghar@spilmanlaw.com

Partnership Members

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

American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division – 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 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 survivors in areas designated as federal disaster sites.

Legal Aid of West Virginia – Legal Aid of West Virginia provides free advocacy services to West Virginians through 12 offices in every part of the state. The organization advocates for low-income, vulnerable West Virginians, seeks equal access to justice, and creates system change in order to improve client safety, health, housing, income and access to resources.