

Free Legal Assistance Available for California Fire Survivors

October 18, 2017 - A legal hotline is now available for survivors of the fires in California in Butte, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Nevada, Orange, Sonoma, and Yuba 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 415-575-3120. Hours are 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m., Monday-Friday. Starting October 23, 2017, hotline hours are 8:30 a.m. - 8:00 p.m., Monday-Thursday. 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 Bay Area Resilience Collaborative or BARC (The Bar Association of San Francisco's SF-Marine Lawyer Referral and Information Service and the Justice & Diversity Center; Alameda County Bar Association and the Volunteer Legal Services Corporation; State Bar of California, Bay Area Legal Aid; and Pro Bono Net), 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-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 cases that will produce a money award. Such matters can be referred for skilled lawyer representation through a State Bar of California certified lawyer referral service in your area.

There are two additional hotline resources:

- Bay Area Legal Aid's Legal Advice Line with a dedicated emergency response line for Napa County residents only: 800-551-5554.
- Bay Area Legal Aid's Health Consumer Center line for help with Medi-Cal; medical insurance coverage issues; prescription coverage; coverage while needing to temporarily relocate out-of-state for residents of Napa and Sonoma Counties only: 855-693-7285.

Free Legal Assistance Available for California Fire Survivors (continued)

MAJOR DISASTER DECLARATION

On October 10, 2017, a Major Disaster Declaration was issued for the state of California, making federal funding available to individuals and business owners in Napa and Sonoma Counties who sustained damage as a result of the fires. Butte, Lake, Mendocino, Nevada, Orange, and Yuba Counties were added subsequently.

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

Free Legal Assistance Available for California Fire Survivors (continued)

(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 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.

Bay Area Resilience Collaborative – BARC is a group of representatives from the entities below that have developed a regional coordination plan for the provision of legal services in the aftermath of a major disaster in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The Bar Association of San Francisco's SF-Marine Lawyer Referral and Information Service and the Justice & Diversity Center – BASF provides San Francisco legal professionals with networking and pro bono opportunities to better serve the community. The SF-Marine LRIS is a State Bar of California certified lawyer referral service program providing experienced, insured attorneys for consultation and case representation and community legal resources information to the public. The Justice & Diversity Center advances fairness and equality by providing pro bono legal services to low-income people, and educational programs that foster diversity in the legal profession.

Alameda County Bar Association and Volunteer Legal Services Corporation – The ACBA is a community of lawyers who live or practice in Alameda County and who are committed to excellence in the profession and facilitating equal access to justice. VLSC provides free legal assistance to low-income communities in a variety of areas, as well as running a legal incubator to help new attorneys open community-based practices.

State Bar of California – The State Bar of California's mission is to protect the public and includes the primary functions of

Free Legal Assistance Available for California Fire Survivors (continued)

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.

Bay Area Legal Aid – BayLegal ensures fairness in the civil justice system for the most vulnerable members of the community. From Silicon Valley to Napa Valley, clients receive help to protect their livelihoods, their health, and their families.

Pro Bono Net – Pro Bono Net is a nonprofit leader in developing innovative technology and forging collaborations that enable legal advocates to make a stronger impact, increase volunteer participation and empower the public with legal resources and self-help tools.

Legal Aid Association of California – LAAC is the statewide membership organization for almost 100 legal nonprofits. LAAC advocates for more funding and better laws for legal nonprofits, facilitates communication and coordination between organizations, trains in core substantive areas, analyzes best practices, and works to increase access to justice for all Californians.