

Pro Bono Attorneys Serve Hundreds During Difficult Times

More than 500 calls to the Disaster Legal Services Hotline have been referred to pro bono attorneys

Since 2006, the TALS has operated the **Disaster Legal Services Program (DLS)** for Tennessee each time a federally-declared disaster occurs. The DLS plan is in place to ensure that victims in all declared counties receive access to legal services and information. DLS does this by operating a full-time statewide DLS hotline and coordinating with local legal aid programs to recruit, train, and place pro bono attorneys to help victims across the state.

Tennessee Disaster Legal Services is a partnership between the **Tennessee Bar Association**, TALS, **Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA)**, and the **Tennessee Chapter of the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division**. Assisting organizations include the Tennessee Association for Justice, the **Tennessee Justice Center (TJC)**, and the **Disability**



Law and Advocacy Center of TN (DLAC). Each DLS partner plays a crucial role in the delivery of disaster legal services in Tennessee.

Following the devastating May 2010 flooding across Tennessee the Nashville local government began opening Disaster Information Centers for flood victims to receive an array of services. These centers were staffed with volunteer attorneys from the time they opened until they were closed by the city. And, other legal aid offices including Memphis Area Legal Services and West Tennessee Legal Services began mobilizing their attorneys and pro bono partners to assist victims of the disaster.

Since May, more than 200 attorneys have volunteered their services to flood victims.

Though the official FEMA Disaster Legal Services letter didn't come until May 13th, the DLS hotline began receiving calls immediately on May 6th. To date, TALS has fielded over 600 victim calls and referred over 500 cases to pro bono lawyers. The two most common hotline caller concerns have been negotiating insurance and landlord/tenant issues. In addition, TALS has served as a legal information resource for agencies and flood victims by participating in long-term recovery meetings, maintaining List Serves and social media resources, as well as directing pro bono attorneys to areas of particular need, such as non-English speaking individuals and the elderly.

The DLS Hotline is still receiving calls, as of September 2010, Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. To receive disaster legal assistance information and to receive a referral to a DLS pro bono attorney, call 1-888-395-9297.

The Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services would like to thank all DLS partners and volunteer attorneys for their invaluable service to their communities in these times of need.

Photo reference: FEMA 44000 (Source: David Fine/FEMA)

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