

# Help for Storms in 2011

## Disaster Legal Services in Tennessee

Since 2006, TALS has run 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 [Disaster Legal Services Hotline \(1-888-395-9297\)](#) and coordinating with local legal aid programs, bar associations, and other legal associations to recruit, train, and place pro bono attorneys to help victims.

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.

## Disaster Legal Services Following the April 2011 Storms

On April 25 and 28, 2011 storms with damaging winds, tornadoes and hail across the southeast in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Tennessee and Virginia resulted in the [deaths of more than 300](#) people. Though [Alabama](#) was the most heavily affected by these storms, the loss of life and property across the region is devastating. As a result, President Obama has made [federal declarations of emergency](#) in several areas including the Tennessee counties of Bradley, Greene, Hamilton, and Washington.

[FEMA](#) states that, “[FEAM] Assistance can include grants for temporary housing and home repairs, low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses, and other programs to help individuals and business owners recover from the effects of the disaster.”

With the continuation of rain throughout the next week it is anticipated that [new flooding could occur, particularly in the western region](#) of Tennessee. To stay up to date on this situation in Shelby County and find help or volunteer opportunities go to [StaySafeShelby.us](http://StaySafeShelby.us).

Currently, the [Disaster Legal Assistance Hotline \(1-888-395-9297\)](#) is activated to provide a resource for legal assistance to victims of the [April 2011 storms](#). Additionally, victims of disasters in Tennessee may go to the new web resource, [www.OnlineTNJustice.org](http://www.OnlineTNJustice.org).

[OnlineTNJustice](#) is a joint project of the Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services and the Tennessee Bar Association, which is supported by Dell, Microsoft, and the Tennessee Supreme Court's Access to Justice Commission. On this website, Tennesseans are screened for eligibility and, if qualified, allowed to post a question to volunteer attorneys through a private messaging system 24 hours a day. Storm victims who find they do not qualify should still call the hotline to contact a volunteer attorney.

## **Disaster Legal Services Following the May 2010 Flooding**

Following the devastating May 2010 flooding across Tennessee, Metropolitan Nashville government engaged its disaster recovery plan that includes activation of disaster recovery resources in the public and nonprofit sector. As an immediate step, Metro began opening Disaster Information Centers for flood victims to receive an array of services. Thanks to TALS, TBA, and the local legal aid offices, these centers were staffed with volunteer attorneys from the time they opened until they were closed by the city. And across the state other local 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. More than 200 attorneys 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. TALS fielded over 600 victim calls and referred over 500 cases to pro bono lawyers. The two most common hotline caller concerns were negotiating insurance and landlord/tenant issues. In addition, TALS served as a legal information resource for agencies and flood victims by participating in long-term recovery meetings, maintaining listserves and social media resources, and directing pro bono attorneys to areas of particular need, such

as non-English speaking individuals and the elderly.

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.

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