



# FEMA

# Fact Sheet

## Disaster Legal Services

Under section 415 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, Public Law 93-288, 42 U.S.C. 5182, as amended, when the President declares a disaster, FEMA, through an agreement with the Young Lawyers Division of the American Bar Association, provides free legal help to survivors of that disaster through the request of the state, local, tribe, or territory. Disaster Legal Services (DLS) provides confidential legal assistance to low-income individuals who, prior to or because of the disaster, are unable to secure legal services adequate to meet their disaster-related needs. DLS is only provided for survivors of Presidentially declared major disasters that include Individual Assistance (IA).

DLS attorneys are volunteers who offer their time and talents to provide free legal services to disaster survivors; they are not FEMA employees, and any services or conversations that occur between a survivor and one of the attorneys are confidential and will not be shared with FEMA. If volunteer attorneys are unable to assist survivors with their legal needs due to topic and/or time that would generate a fee, survivors will be referred to independent attorneys who can provide pro-bono or low cost services through the lawyer referral network in the impacted area.

The following are the types of disaster legal assistance local lawyers typically provide:

- Help with insurance claims for doctor and hospital bills, loss of property, loss of life, etc.
- Drawing up new wills and other legal papers lost in the disaster
- Help with home repair contracts and contractors
- Advice on problems with landlords
- Estate administration, including guardianships and conservatorships
- Consumer protection matters, remedies, and procedures
- Preparing powers of attorney and guardianship materials
- FEMA appeals and other disaster-related actions against the government

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*FEMA's Mission: "Helping people before, during, and after disasters."*

*Last update: May 2018*