

Free legal assistance available for South Carolina flood victims



A toll-free legal aid hotline is now available to victims of South Carolina's recently declared flood disaster areas in Charleston, Dorchester, Georgetown, Horry, Lexington, Orangeburg, Richland, Sumter, Clarendon and Williamsburg counties. The service, which allows callers to request the assistance of a lawyer to aid in flood related matters, is a partnership between the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division, the South Carolina Bar, the South Carolina Bar Young Lawyers Division and South Carolina Legal Services.

Flood victims facing legal issues who are unable to afford a lawyer may call 1-877-797-2227 ext. 120 (toll-free) or (803) 576-3815 (local) between 9:00 AM and 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday, to request assistance. When connected to the hotline, callers should identify that they are seeking disaster-related legal assistance, brief details of the assistance needed and in which county they are located. Individuals who qualify for assistance will be matched with South Carolina lawyers who have volunteered to provide free legal assistance. Flood victims may also request assistance online by e-mailing DisasterInfo@SCBar.org.

The type of legal assistance available includes:

- Assistance with securing FEMA and other government benefits available to disaster victims;
- 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;
- Assistance in consumer protection matters, remedies and procedures;
- Counseling on mortgage-foreclosure problems; and
- Counseling on landlord-tenant problems.

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 victims 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 volunteers in affected areas to handle victims' cases.

Victims should be aware that there are 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 a court). Such cases are referred to a local lawyer referral service.

Currently disaster relief services are available to flood victims in the South Carolina counties that have been declared major disaster areas. For flood victims seeking legal assistance outside of the declared counties, please contact South Carolina Legal Services at 888-346-5592.

Partner Members:

The following organizations have joined forces to establish a toll-free phone line for South Carolina disaster victims to request free legal assistance and to provide volunteer attorneys to handle cases arising from recent flooding in Charleston, Dorchester, Georgetown, Horry, Lexington, Orangeburg, Richland, Sumter, Clarendon and Williamsburg counties.

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.

South Carolina Bar

The South Carolina Bar is a professional membership group of more than 15,000 lawyers that is committed to advancing justice, professionalism and understanding of the law in South Carolina.

South Carolina Bar Young Lawyers Division

The Young Lawyers Division (YLD) of the South Carolina Bar is a professional service organization comprised of all members of the South Carolina Bar in good standing under 36 years of age, or those admitted to the South Carolina Bar as their first bar within the past 5 years. The YLD coordinates various programs across the state designed to serve the public, advance the legal profession or both.

South Carolina Legal Services

South Carolina Legal Services (SCLS) provides free legal services in a wide variety of civil (non-criminal) legal matters to eligible low income residents of South Carolina. SCLS is a non-profit law firm, funded by grants from the federally funded Legal Services Corporation, the South Carolina Bar Foundation, local United Ways, state court filing fees and other federal, state and local funding.

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