Disaster Legal Services in NY and NJ Post–Sandy: Collaboration and Communities

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Pro Bono Net
August 8, 2014
Presentation Outline

- The legal response to Sandy
- Observations and lessons learned
- Ongoing needs
- Using technology to get legal help
The Sandy Legal Response

- Legal Services
- Private bar
- Law schools
- Advocates and partners

- Hotlines
- Presence at DRCs
- Community outreach
- Self-help resources
Legal Needs Post–Sandy

- FEMA applications and appeals
- Insurance claims (flood, home and auto)
- Contractor fraud
- Landlord–tenant disputes
- Build it Back + NY Rising
Observations

- Different victims had very different needs
- Difficulty with government assistance
- Pro bono attorneys wanted to help, but were limited in how they could
- Inequalities in storm’s impact and recovery
What were the 2-3 most successful elements of the Sandy legal response?

- Using technology
- Bridging language and cultural barriers
- Collaboration with other non-lawyers
- Collaboration with government agencies
- Outreach to affected communities
- Disposition of cases
- Assignment of cases
- Volunteer management
- Volunteer recruitment
- Establishing operations
- Collaboration across organizations

Legend:
- Legal Services
- Law firm
- Law school
What were the 2-3 most challenging elements of the Sandy legal response?

- Using technology
- Bridging language and cultural barriers
- Collaboration with other non-lawyers
- Collaboration with government agencies
- Outreach to affected communities
- Disposition of cases
- Assignment of cases
- Volunteer management
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Legal Services
Law firm
Law school
Lessons Learned

- Need for attorney flexibility / coordination
- Preparedness and response plans important
- Efficient use of pro bono attorneys
- Technology integral to disaster legal aid
Continuing Legal Needs

De Blasio Cites Progress in Push to Fix Homes Damaged by Hurricane Sandy

BY MIKITA STEWART  JULY 17, 2014

Superstorm Sandy lawsuit deadline in dispute

MAY 19, 2014, 10:36 PM   LAST UPDATED: TUESDAY, MAY 20, 2014, 4:34 PM
BY KAREN SUDOL
STAFF WRITER
THE RECORD

Hurricane Sandy survivors pack summit struggling over lack of aid for rebuilding their homes

Nearly a thousand people packed the Greater Allen A.M.E Cathedral in Jamaica, Queens, for the rebuilding summit hosted by Faith In New York.

BY ERIN DURKIN  Follow /  NEW YORK DAILY NEWS / Wednesday, July 30, 2014, 12:31 AM

Red tape still holding up some LI homeowners from rebuilding 19 months after Sandy

From Anger to Evidence

Victims report incompetence in Sandy recovery, and City Comptroller Scott Stringer is listening carefully

By Genevieve Belmaker, Epoch Times | May 22, 2014

Last Updated: May 22, 2014 9:27 pm
Using technology to get legal help

National Disaster Legal Aid RESOURCE CENTER

Welcome to the National Disaster Legal Aid Resource Center!
The goals of DisasterLegalAid.org are:
- To serve as a centralized national resource for legal aid, pro bono and criminal defender attorneys across the country on legal issues related to all types of disasters,
- To recruit and help mobilize pro bono attorneys in the aftermath of a disaster, and
- To provide accurate and timely information on legal issues related to disasters to the low and moderate

Recent Disaster Legal Services News
At White House National Disaster Briefing, ship on fire in Atlantic Ocean, Feb 14, 2023
FEMA administrator says it will be a long time before the disaster recovery is complete
Lansing, MI, a $140 million flood aid fund

FLORIDA TORNADOES AND FLOODS
- Florida Disaster Relief Hotline (800) 967-7323
- FEMA Disaster Recovery Center locations
- Volunteer opportunities
- ABA Young Lawyers Division

ACTIVE DISASTER QUICK LINKS

ALABAMA TORNADOES AND FLOODS
ARKANSAS TORNADOES
MISSISSIPPI TORNADOES
WASHINGTON MUDSLIDE
SUPERSTORM SANDY

OTHER ONLINE RESOURCES
- ABA Disaster Recovery Resource Center
- FEMA Disaster Assistance
- Red Cross Map of open shelters & getting assistance
Resources on DisasterLegalAid.org

- Disaster-specific information
  - Hotlines
  - Handbooks
  - Clinic information
- Background on key issues
  - Housing
  - Replacing documents
  - Filing insurance claims
  - Applying for assistance
- Interactive tools
  - FEMA appeals tool
National Disaster LEGAL AID

Superstorm Sandy


- Residents and businesses affected by the hurricane can apply for government disaster relief benefits online at http://www.disasterassistance.gov.
- You can also find organizations in your state that can provide free legal help to you, if you are eligible, by visiting http://www.LawHelp.org. NJ residents can call 1-888-541-1900.
- Stay up-to-date with the latest on the News page.

RESOURCES
- DHAP Sandy PowerPoint | Staten Island Interfaith and Long Term Recovery Organization offers a powerpoint presentation overview of DHAP Sandy.
- TPMA Housing Portal | A searchable nationwide database that lists properties that may be obtained by people displaced by disasters. This can be used to find properties that can be rented under the DHAP program(s).
- Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP) Sandy | A long-term disaster housing assistance program for survivors of Hurricane Sandy. This program...

MORE RESOURCES
- Hurricane Sandy Resources in New York | LawHelp.org/ny has online legal information and resources for New Yorkers affected by Hurricane Sandy.
- Hurricane Sandy Resources in New Jersey | Legal Services of New Jersey has online legal information and resources for residents of New Jersey affected by Hurricane Sandy.
- Legal Help for New York Nonprofit Organizations | In the wake of Hurricane Sandy, Lawyers Alliance represents and provides legal information to New York nonprofits assisting disaster victims. It helps...
Example Tool: FEMA Appeals

- FEMA has no standardized appeal
- City Bar Justice Center developed pro se form after Sandy
- Pro Bono Net created online version
- Hosted on DisasterLegalAid.org
Welcome to the FEMA Appeal template.

This free program will help you to appeal from a denial by FEMA, or payment of less than the amount you claimed. To do this, the program will prepare an appeal letter and a request for your FEMA file.

This template is only for use by people in the Hurricane Sandy Disaster Zone who already filed for FEMA assistance and want to appeal FEMA’s decision.

**APPEAL OF DENIAL OF ASSISTANCE**

**Applicant Contact Information:**
- **Name:** John Smith
- **Current Address:** 123 Main St, Anytown, New York 12345
- **Telephone:** (123) 456-7890
- **Alternate Telephone:** 
- **E-mail:**

**Dear FEMA Appeals Officer:**

By this letter I am appealing FEMA’s decision on my application for assistance. Enclosed is a copy of FEMA’s eligibility notification letter, dated January 1, 2012, and the FEMA cover sheet (with bar code).

I had the following interactions with FEMA (including visits from inspectors, conversations with FEMA representatives and correspondence with FEMA) on the following dates:
Questions?

- For legal help
  - [www.disasterlegalaid.org/sandy](http://www.disasterlegalaid.org/sandy)
  - New York Department of Financial Services Hotline: 800–339–1759