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Disaster Assistance May Include Free Legal Services

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ANDOVER, Mass. -- If March storms and flooding swept away essential documents or caused other potential legal headaches, a Commonwealth-FEMA disaster assistance program called Disaster Legal Services may be able to provide help.

The free legal assistance program helps eligible low-income applicants in disaster designated counties with the following legal services:

- 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;
- Preparing powers of attorney; and
- Other disaster-related legal issues.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funds the administrative costs of the program, which is coordinated through the Young Lawyers Division of the American Bar Association.

To be eligible, applicants must live, work or own a business in Bristol, Essex, Middlesex, Norfolk, Plymouth, Suffolk or Worcester counties. Assistance is not available for cases that could produce a fee. These cases will be forwarded to a local attorney referral service.

The toll-free number for Disaster Legal Services is 866-627-7577, open from 9 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Monday through Friday, until further notice. When calling:

- Callers will first hear an informational recording before a multilingual operator comes on the line. The first part of the message refers to the FEMA program. This information is given in both English and Spanish. The second half of the message is non-FEMA related.
- Following the recording, the live operator will be able to assist callers in English or Spanish along with limited Portuguese fluency. After-hours messages may be left. Calls will be returned the next business day. Additional information is available on the internet at www.masslawhelp.com.

Commonwealth and FEMA recovery officials want to remind Massachusetts residents who suffered losses due to the March storms and flooding to register for disaster assistance from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily, until further notice by calling **800-621-FEMA (3362)** or TTY 800-462-7585 for applicants with hearing or speech disabilities. Online registration is available at www.DisasterAssistance.gov.

FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders and to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.

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