****

Legal Access Alameda (formerly Volunteer Legal Services Corporation, in Oakland, California) invites your firm to consider joining the **LEGAL FIRST RESPONDERSSM** Program!

Free legal services to the public in the aftermath of a disaster are critical. Our LEGAL FIRST RESPONDERSSM program keeps a corps of volunteer attorneys trained and ready to respond in the immediate aftermath. Membership in the Program requires a commitment of at least 20 hours per year.

**What does it mean to be a member of the LEGAL FIRST RESPONDERSSM Program?**

* Training
  + Volunteers will receive 10 hours of online training on subject areas critical to survivors of disasters, including
    - FEMA benefits
    - Landlord-tenant
    - Employment
    - Consumer
    - Probate
    - Insurance (barring conflict issues)
    - How to work with someone who may be traumatized by their experience
  + Following the training, volunteers will complete a one hour written or in person exercise to cement their understanding of the subjects in the training
* Deployment
  + In the event of a disaster, volunteers will spend at least 9 hours:
    - Staffing a disaster legal advice hotline (at a center, or remotely)
    - Staffing a legal table at a centralized Disaster Resource Center (alongside Red Cross, FEMA, United Way, food bank, etc.)
    - Staffing a disaster-related clinic located at a legal services or social services provider (Some clinics will cover many areas of law, while others may be focused on FEMA appeals or insurance issues.)
    - Handling a pro bono case (e.g. eviction case, FEMA appeal, insurance litigation, etc.) for a survivor of a disaster.
    - Serving as an expert mentor to other volunteers serving survivors of a disaster
  + Disasters
    - may be local or regional, or even in a different part of California
    - could be a major firestorm or earthquake, or a fire affecting one apartment building
    - could be in other areas, with assistance provided remotely
  + In the unlikely event that there is no disaster in a given calendar year, volunteers will complete their time commitment by attending a “table exercise” to assist in planning for a disaster and to ensure that volunteers keep their knowledge current.
* Some examples of legal issues that are critical in the weeks and months after a disaster:
  + Am I eligible for FEMA benefits? How do I fill out the application? Why was my application denied? How do I appeal?
  + My apartment was severely damaged in the disaster. Am I still obligated to pay rent? Is the landlord obligated to fix it? What happens to my security deposit?
  + My workplace was destroyed in the disaster. Am I entitled to unemployment?
  + My spouse was killed in the fire, and his will was in our house, which was destroyed. What do I do now?
  + My ex and I shared custody of our three children. But his house was destroyed, and he has moved to Nebraska to be with family. What will happen with the kids?
* Conflicts
  + Pro bono attorneys will have the opportunity to check for conflicts when doing disaster work, just as with other pro bono work
  + Firms may rule out employment or insurance work on behalf of survivors, if this is important to them
  + California Rule of Professional Conduct 6.5 (ABA Rule 1.65) will apply for most of the pro bono opportunities available after a disaster.
* Credit for education
  + Because of the importance of training attorneys in advance of a disaster, we hope that firms will consider making an exception to any rules limiting pro bono credit for education only, provided that the pro bono attorneys complete the deployment or table exercise portions of the program.
* Location of training, exercises, and deployment
  + For the first year or two, the LEGAL FIRST RESPONDERSSM Program will be limited to Northern California. Pro bono attorneys from throughout Northern California (from Santa Cruz and Fresno to the Oregon border) are welcome to join. We will revisit whether to expand the program statewide once it is well established in Northern California
  + Trainings and exercises will take place in San Francisco or Oakland. Depending on demand, and available space, they may be extended to Silicon Valley or elsewhere.
* Collaborative deployment
  + Pro bono attorneys with the LEGAL FIRST RESPONDERSSM Program will be volunteering with the Disaster Legal Help Collaborative, and not with just one legal services provider. Malpractice insurance will be provided by Legal Access Alameda, but volunteers may be directed to various clinics or hotlines run by other agencies. Disaster response is by necessity a regional effort, and not limited to one program or another.

*A law firm with 6 or more pro bono attorneys who successfully complete the LEGAL FIRST RESPONDERSSM Program will be acknowledged in program materials.*

**For more information, contact Tiela Chalmers at Legal Access Alameda**

[**tiela@acbanet.org**](mailto:tiela@acbanet.org) **or 510.302.2208**