

Young Lawyers

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WHEN DISASTER STRIKES, THE YLS IS HERE TO HELP

Natural disasters are inevitable, often arriving without advance notice and causing catastrophic damage to those caught in their paths. Mother Nature once again reminded many Nevadans of this last month. But the impact of the inclement weather that hit northwestern Nevada in January provides me with another opportunity to shine a spotlight on the great work undertaken by my colleagues in the State Bar of Nevada's Young Lawyers Section (YLS) and their dedication to serving Nevadans in need.

As an affiliate organization of the American Bar Association's Young Lawyer's Division (YLD), the YLS is responsible for interfacing with the YLD to implement Disaster Legal Services, a program that brings together resources from the YLD and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to help address legal needs that arise for low-income survivors¹ of natural disasters in Nevada. While my own acquaintance with Disaster Legal Services goes back only a few years, through my involvement with the YLS, Disaster Legal Services' origins can be traced

back to 1969, when Hurricane Camille wreaked havoc on the Gulf Coast, claiming 259 human lives and causing billions of dollars in damage.

In recent years, being prepared to address the legal needs of Nevadans adversely impacted by natural disasters has become a focal point for the YLS, through the leadership and dedication of current YLS Secretary, Scott Lachman. Even when a federal disaster has not been declared, and FEMA and Disaster Legal Services are not directly involved in providing relief, the YLS stands ready to work alongside Nevada's legal service providers to address the legal needs of low-income members of our community in the event of natural disasters.²

As you are all likely aware by now, Governor Brian Sandoval and various counties in northwestern Nevada declared a state of emergency when inclement weather was headed for the region. That weather ultimately led to flooding, landslides, significant avalanche risks in the higher elevations and long-term power outages for many residents. Meanwhile, as the rough weather set in, and I, along with many others, hunkered down at home to wait out the storm, Scott took action, initiating the YLS's response to the situation. He reached out to many of our interested partners, including the State Bar of Nevada, Nevada Legal Services, the Washoe County Bar Association, Washoe Legal Services, Volunteer Attorneys for Rural Nevadans and YLD leadership involved with Disaster Legal Services. Scott's proactive measures helped spark timely communication and coordination between these organizations, ensuring that volunteer attorneys would be prepared to mobilize and provide assistance if and when necessary.

Fortunately, the damage incurred by the storms did not require the declaration of an emergency at the federal level. But not

everyone in northern Nevada came through them unscathed; many homes and businesses suffered significant weather damage. And, as I write this column, more wet winter weather is headed for the Sierra, carrying with it the potential to create further complications for many Nevadans in the region.

So, while we are not completely out of the woods, and the necessary response to the needs of Nevadans affected by the series of storms that continues to hit northwestern Nevada remains undefined, through Scott's planning, guidance and dedication to disaster preparedness—including prior efforts to coordinate with Disaster Legal Services and address the legal needs of Nevadans under similar circumstances³—the YLS remains constantly prepared to work with its partners by offering assistance to Nevadans in need of legal help in the event of natural disaster. As the need for such assistance arises, the YLS will ask its members and those of the entire state bar, to join in efforts to provide much-needed aid to our fellow Nevadans. **NL**

1. See 44 CFR 206.164(a) (defining "low-income individual").
2. Not long ago, our indefatigable partners at Nevada Legal Services were also recognized by the YLD in its publication, *The Affiliate*, for sponsoring training with the YLD for volunteer lawyers, regarding what to expect, how to respond and what resources are available when addressing the needs of survivors of a natural disaster. See David H.K. Nguyen, "Nevada Legal Services is DLS Trained—Is your Affiliate?" *The Affiliate*, March/April 2015, http://www.americanbar.org/publications/the_affiliate/2015/march-april/nevada_legal_services_dls_trained_is_your_affiliate.html.
3. *Free Legal Help for Flood Victims: Assistance offered in dealing with insurance companies, contractors*, CBS Las Vegas (Sept. 24, 2014, 4:13 AM) <http://lasvegas.cbslocal.com/2014/09/24/free-legal-help-for-flood-victims/>.