

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LEGAL SERVICES ANNOUNCES COORDINATED STATEWIDE LEGAL ASSISTANCE TO HURRICANE SANDY VICTIMS WITH SUPPORT OF A MAJOR NEW GRANT

EDISON – Legal Services of New Jersey (LSNJ), the coordinating organization for New Jersey’s Legal Services system, announced today a major initiative to provide free legal assistance to Hurricane Sandy victims.

“Many tens of thousands of New Jersey residents devastated by Hurricane Sandy have numerous new legal problems for which they need lawyers,” declared Melville D. Miller, Jr., president of LSNJ. “Even though Legal Services has lost nearly half of its funding because of the recession, we are committed to taking extraordinary measures to assist as many of the Sandy victims as possible. A new grant LSNJ has received from the Robin Hood Foundation will help greatly in launching this effort.”

He continued, “We will be reaching directly into communities and neighborhoods, working with our long-established local agencies and partners – as well as our new partners and fellow Robin Hood grantees the Community Food Bank of New Jersey and the FoodBank of Monmouth and Ocean Counties – to do legal clinics, train agency staff, and serve individual clients. We also encourage Sandy victims to call 1-888-222-5765, our new statewide Sandy hotline.”

Miller noted the \$550,000 Robin Hood grant to LSNJ is initially for six months, and will support a combination of attorneys, paralegals and social workers. “In addition to providing individual representation, we will be compiling information and data on patterns of problems, the effectiveness of responses, and the adequacy of long-term recovery planning, especially affordable housing.”

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Sandy-caused legal problems “run the gamut,” said Miller. “Typical are securing FEMA and other related assistance, defending evictions and foreclosures, ensuring continuity of education, obtaining SNAP (food stamps) benefits, unemployment insurance, emergency cash and protecting against discrimination, and many other issues. The greatest volume of problems have come from the four shore counties – Ocean, Monmouth, Atlantic and Cape May,” Miller noted. “Also impacted were Hudson, Bergen and Middlesex.”

He emphasized that immediate legal assistance is critical because all in need face a hard FEMA filing deadline of December 31, and most people need legal advice *before* they apply to FEMA, Miller said. “We will provide that advice.” He further stressed that people also should know they need to apply for Disaster SNAP (Food Stamps) aid by Monday, December 3.

In addition to calling the Sandy Hotline (1-888-222-5765), people who are financially eligible for LSNJ services are also encouraged to visit its community website, www.lsnjlaw.org, to expedite their requests for legal help.

“The much-appreciated grant of \$550,000 from the Robin Hood Foundation is of enormous help at a time when low-income people cannot afford lawyers of their own, but still have many of the same Sandy-related legal issues as others in the Garden State,” said Miller.

In recent years, LSNJ has lost nearly half of its funding and has had to cut back on the number of people it can assist who are seeking help in dealing with such legal issues as evictions, foreclosures, child custody and many other problems.

As a repercussion of the funding cutbacks Legal Services has faced in recent years, its statewide staff has decreased from 720 to about 400.

“Normally, there are more than 400,000 New Jerseyans every year who do not get any help in dealing with civil legal problems. Now, that number clearly will be much higher because of the many more issues and affected people in the wake of Sandy,” Miller said.

LSNJ already has begun conducting training and briefing sessions for its staffers, and ultimately expects to train and pull together a corps of *pro bono* lawyers for the maze of Sandy issues.

The Robin Hood Foundation was founded in 1988 and primarily has provided grants for anti-poverty programs in New York City. The wide-scale mayhem left by the hurricane led to the foundation's decision to provide help for others in the region ravaged by Sandy. Since Sandy struck, the foundation has awarded \$8.2 million.

The Sandy hotline and the new grant are part of LSNJ's coordinated effort with the six regional Legal Services offices to deal with Sandy. The Edison-based operation also has various websites offering a constant stream of new information pertinent to the poor, and a special website designed to enlist lawyers from across the state to offer *pro bono* services. Highly-focused training sessions are offered to attorneys who agree to take on at least one case.

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Legal Services of New Jersey, located in Edison, is the coordinating office for the state's system of Legal Services programs, which provide essential legal aid in civil matters to low-income people in all of the state's 21 counties.