

Disaster Legal Services

Release Date: Jan 21, 2025

The Disaster Legal Services (DLS) program is authorized under section 415 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, Public Law 93-288, as codified at 42 U.S.C. § 5182, and may be implemented upon issuance of a Presidentially declared major disaster that includes Individual Assistance and authorizes DLS.

DLS provides confidential, free legal assistance to survivors who need legal help due to a major disaster, but who do not have the means to secure adequate legal services. For individuals seeking DLS, there is no formal application process. Individuals can access these services by contacting the phone number designated for the specific major disaster, which is established once the program has been authorized. In addition to this phone number, individuals can visit FEMA Disaster Recovery Centers where DLS attorneys may be physically located.

The program must be delivered in an equitable and impartial manner, without discrimination on the grounds of race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, English proficiency, or economic status. Providers of DLS must plan to meet the needs of people with access and functional needs, such as people with limited English proficiency and individuals with disabilities who are deaf or hard of hearing and may use sign language or captioning.

Attorneys are volunteers who provide survivors with legal counseling, advice, and, when appropriate, legal representation in non-fee generating cases that are not against the federal government. DLS attorneys are not FEMA employees. Any services or conversations that occur between a survivor and a DLS attorney are confidential and will not be shared with FEMA. If volunteer attorneys are unable to assist survivors with their legal needs due to the topic at issue and/or time that would generate a fee, survivors will be referred to independent attorneys who can provide pro-bono (without charge) or low-cost services through the lawyer referral network in the impacted area. To learn more about the DLS program, please visit the [Disaster Legal Services Program \(americanbar.org\)](https://americanbar.org/disaster-legal-services).

Services typically provided through DLS include:



- Help with insurance claims for doctor and hospital bills, loss of property, loss of life, etc.
- Drafting of new wills and other legal papers lost in the disaster.
- Assistance with home repair contracts and contractors.
- Counseling and advice about landlord/tenant matters.
- Estate administration, including guardianships and conservatorships.
- Help with consumer protection matters, remedies, and procedures.
- Preparation of powers of attorney and guardianship materials.
- FEMA appeals support, such as identifying and gathering relevant documentation.

