

PRESS RELEASE

Free Legal Assistance Available through New Website

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NASHVILLE, May 4, 2011 — A new website that allows Tennesseans to seek free legal advice from volunteer lawyers is now available at OnlineTNJustice.org. The service – a joint project of the Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services and the Tennessee Bar Association – will provide an immediate resource for victims of recent storms, flooding and tornadoes who need legal assistance. Beyond that, it will provide an on-going service for Tennesseans who need civil legal help but are unable to afford a lawyer. More than 250 volunteer lawyers stand ready to provide services through the site.

The website is a virtual walk-in clinic where clients can request brief advice and counsel about a specific civil legal issue from a volunteer lawyer. The lawyers will provide information and basic legal advice without any expectation of long-term representation.

While Tennessee lawyers have held thousands of legal clinics and helped tens of thousands of fellow residents through traditional pro bono methods, this website was created to eliminate any lingering barriers – such as geographic location, work schedule or family obligations – that keep those in need from receiving free legal help. It also was developed to expand pro bono services in rural areas of the state and to provide an alternative source of assistance for legal aid clients who are eligible for services but turned away due to an agency's lack of resources.

In announcing the new service, TBA President and Chattanooga attorney Sam Elliott said, "With its statewide reach and ability to match volunteer attorneys with those in need at times and places where practical difficulties interfere with personal contact, this website represents a paradigm shift in the delivery of pro bono legal services."

Erik Cole, executive director of the Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services, also said "This project provides one more option for low-income Tennesseans seeking legal help, and it provides an innovative new way for lawyers to help them."

The website was developed with the financial support and technical expertise of the information technology team in the Memphis office of Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz PC. led by the firm's Chief Information Officer John Green, devoted a considerable amount of time to the project. Memphis attorney and former TBA President George T. "Buck" Lewis, a shareholder at Baker Donelson, praised the effort saying, "I am extremely proud of the work our information technology team has done to make this site a reality." In commenting on the new service, Lewis – who has been active in access to justice issues for most of his career – said, "This is the first statewide resource of its type in the country. From the start, it has been our fervent hope that this site would be a convenient way for more lawyers to provide help to those in need."

Eligibility

Eligibility for service through OnlineTNJustice.org is open to Tennessee residents who:

- Have civil legal concerns (criminal law matters will not be accepted);
- Have a household income less than 250% of the federal poverty level (for example, under current law, a family of four could earn up to \$55,875 and still participate);
- Have liquid assets up to \$5,000 in value (this includes checking and savings accounts as well stocks and

bonds); and

Are not incarcerated

How it Works

The online system will screen potential clients for eligibility and, if they are qualified, will allow them to post a legal question to a secure messaging system. Questions will be answered by private attorneys volunteering their time. Clients will have the ability to check the system for answers at any time. Only the name of the client will be shared with the volunteer attorney. All other information is anonymous to ensure privacy.

Lawyers will have the ability to log on to the site 24 hours a day and answer questions from the public at a time that best suits their schedules. Lawyers will receive continuing legal education credit for the time they spend researching and answering questions, and they will be covered by professional liability insurance maintained by the Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services.

Program Partners

The following organizations have played an instrumental role in the design and development of this new service. Special thanks is also due to Dell, Microsoft, the law firm of Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz PC and the Tennessee Supreme Court's Access to Justice Commission for its critical support of this project.

Tennessee Bar Association (TBA) – The TBA is the largest professional association in Tennessee with over 11,000 members. Founded in 1881, the TBA provides opportunities for continuing legal education, professional development and public service. The TBA's dedication to serving the state's legal community is evidenced by its membership roll, which represents the entire spectrum of legal practice: plaintiff and defense lawyers, corporate counsel, judges, prosecutors, public defenders, government lawyers and legal services attorneys.

Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services (TALS) – TALS is a statewide non-profit organization that seeks to build partnerships to support the delivery of effective civil legal services to low-income and elderly Tennesseans. TALS is committed to increasing equal access to justice across Tennessee. For more information contact (615) 627-0956 or visit the alliance online at <http://www.tals.org>.

Other Resources for Storm Victims

Tennesseans in need of disaster-related legal assistance also may call a toll-free hotline to request free legal advice. The hotline, established by the Tennessee Bar Association and the Tennessee Alliance for Legal Services, can be reached by calling (888) 395-9297.