

Welfare Law Center and colleagues file federal class action challenging FEMA's failure to provide accessible trailers to Katrina and Rita victims

Last week, the Welfare Law Center, Advocacy Center (of Louisiana), Mississippi Center for Justice, and The Public Interest Law Project (California) filed *Brou v. FEMA*, a federal class action in the Eastern District of Louisiana challenging FEMA's failure to provide accessible trailers and/or other housing assistance to persons with disabilities who were rendered homeless by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Tens of thousands of persons in the Gulf region still are without permanent or even adequate temporary, housing. One of the solutions FEMA has offered has been to provide mobile homes or trailers for temporary use.

Unfortunately, despite the wide-spread prevalence of persons with disabilities in the population of evacuees, FEMA has not provided people with disabilities with trailers that are physically accessible for them. Some evacuees who have requested accessible trailers are still waiting for trailers; others have been given inaccessible trailers and told that they will be replaced with accessible trailers or modified to be accessible at a later date, which has not occurred; and others have been provided with trailers that FEMA claims are accessible or "ADA friendly" that have many inaccessible features. As a result, many people with disabilities cannot enter or exist their trailers, bathe, cook, use the toilet, get in and out of bed, and engage in other activities of daily living at all, or safely and independently. Some wheelchair users cannot even turn around in the trailers they have been provided because there is so little space.

The lawsuit seeks declaratory and injunctive relief requiring FEMA to: provided the class with accessible trailers, create a system in which FEMA ascertains the needs of evacuees with disabilities who seek housing assistance and meets those needs, engage in monitoring, and seeks other relief.

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