

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Karl Camillucci, camilluk@staff.abanet.org
(312) 988-6148
Deborah E. Dubois, d.dubois@nlada.org
(202) 452-0620

Hydi Miller, millerh@lsc.gov
(202) 295-1615
Mark O'Brien, mobrien@Probono.net
(212) 760-2554

NATIONAL LEGAL AID PARTNERS LAUNCH “KATRINA LEGAL AID RESOURCE CENTER”

www.KatrinaLegalaid.org offers legal aid resources to persons affected by Katrina and Rita, legal aid and defender programs helping them and private attorney volunteers

WASHINGTON, DC, September 26, 2005 – Tens of thousands of Gulf Coast residents face devastating legal problems as they struggle to rebuild their lives in the wake of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, but many people cannot afford and do not know where to get the legal assistance they need. To help address this problem, four national allies in the legal aid and public defender communities have launched “Katrina Legal Aid Resource Center,” a Web-based clearinghouse of legal aid, pro bono and public defender information for persons affected by the hurricanes and the lawyers and advocates helping them. Katrina Legal Aid Resource Center, located at www.katrinalegalaid.org, is the result of a partnership among the American Bar Association (ABA), Legal Services Corporation (LSC), National Legal Aid & Defender Association (NLADA) and Pro Bono Net.

“So many people have suffered tragedies beyond comprehension as a result of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Sadly, many of those people are from the low-income community whose need for legal assistance has only escalated in the wake of these disasters. The daunting task that many of our legal aid and public defender colleagues face as they prepare to assist a growing number of clients is overwhelming,” said Jo-Ann Wallace, NLADA president and CEO.

Katrina Legal Aid Resource Center offers a significant number of legal aid, public defender, pro bono and referral resources to persons affected by the hurricanes who must navigate a maze of legal, government and insurance issues, and to advocates and lawyers committed to helping them. The site also offers private attorneys information on how they can assist the many legal aid lawyers and advocates in their efforts to serve communities devastated by this unprecedented tragedy.

“LSC and its partners are working tirelessly to ensure that those impacted by Hurricane Katrina and Rita and the lawyers and advocates who support them have the resources they need to rebuild the many lives that have been shattered by the devastation wrought by Katrina and Rita,” said LSC President Helaine M. Barnett. “We intend to increase the number of resources we offer to the Gulf Coast evacuees, but are hopeful that the information presented thus far will provide some relief as the task of rebuilding lives begins.”

“These hurricanes have exacted an enormous human toll, but they also are shaping up to be one of the greatest legal services crises in the history of our country. Persons affected by the hurricanes need legal assistance and the ABA and its members will make sure they have free legal services as long as it takes to help them rebuild their lives,” said Michael S. Greco, president of the ABA.

The template for Katrina Legal Aid Resource Center is based upon one developed by Pro Bono Net to coordinate the New York legal community's response to the events of September 11th in New York City. Debevoise & Plimpton assisted in the development of the local pro bono section and Mule Design provided design services pro bono. The site focuses on three broad areas of help:

For People Who Need Help

The site provides state by state links and information on how to receive assistance with a number of legal and non-legal problems, including finding a legal aid or pro bono lawyer, locating emergency and temporary housing, filing insurance claims, and understanding their legal rights and what they can do to protect them.

For Legal Aid and Public Defender Programs

Legal aid and public defender lawyers on the front lines can find information and links in a broad array of issues. Some of those resource categories are: Child Welfare; Disability; Food Program Resources; Government and Government Services; Health Law; Housing; Immigration; License / Identification; Prisons; Social Security; State Disaster Manuals; Unemployment Compensation / Unemployment Insurance; and Welfare Resources. These pages also allow for posting of news about specific legal services (civil and defender) programs and individuals that have been affected by the hurricane and that are working hard to rebuild their physical structures as well as their personal and professional lives.

For Pro Bono Volunteers

Lawyers who want to offer pro bono assistance to persons in affected areas may register online through an ABA database that matches lawyers with volunteer opportunities most suited to their expertise and interests. Private lawyers may also find a listing of opportunities to volunteer in numerous states and localities, along with information about lawyer training programs to prepare them to assist persons affected by the hurricane. The site also provides information for lawyers who want to provide assistance to evacuees who have been relocated to other states, including Texas, Georgia, Tennessee, New York and the District of Columbia.

The coordinated substantive response to those in need as a result of Katrina and Rita has been extraordinary. In addition to the Katrina Legal Aid Resource Center, the ABA, LSC, NLADA and Pro Bono Net continue to work hard with a number of substantive support centers and emergency legal assistance experts in ensuring that: local advocacy efforts have the backup needed; volunteer advocates have access to substantive resources to assist their efforts; national advocacy responses are adequate; and substantive communications on cross-cutting issues are effective.

For more information, please visit Katrina Legal Aid Resource Center at www.katrinalegalaid.org.

###

With more than 400,000 members, the American Bar Association is the largest voluntary professional membership organization in the world. As the national voice of the legal profession, the ABA works to improve the administration of justice, promotes programs that assist lawyers and judges in their work, accredits law schools, provides continuing legal education, and works to build public understanding around the world of the importance of the rule of law in a democratic society. For more information, please visit <http://www.abanet.org>.

Established by an Act of Congress in 1974, the mission of the **Legal Services Corporation** is to provide equal access to the system of justice and improve opportunities for low income people throughout the United

States by making grants for the provision of high-quality civil legal assistance to those who would be otherwise unable to afford legal counsel. LSC currently funds 140 independent local legal aid programs around the nation. Its 11-member Board of Directors is appointed by the President of the United States with the advice and consent of the U.S. Senate. For more information, please visit <http://www.lsc.gov>.

The **National Legal Aid & Defender Association** (NLADA) champions effective legal assistance for people who cannot afford counsel, serves as a collective voice for both civil legal services and public defense services throughout the nation and provides a wide range of services and benefits to its individual and organizational members. Founded in 1911, NLADA is the oldest and largest national, nonprofit membership organization devoting all of its resources to advocating equal access to justice for all Americans. For more information, please visit <http://www.nlada.org>.

Pro Bono Net is a national, nonprofit organization that works in close partnership with nonprofit legal organizations across the country to increase access to justice for poor and moderate-income people and other vulnerable populations. It does so through (i) supporting the innovative and effective use of technology by the nonprofit legal sector, (ii) increasing participation by volunteer attorneys, and (iii) facilitating collaborations among nonprofit legal organizations and advocates working on similar issues or in the same region. For more information, please visit <http://www.probono.net>.