

ABA's New Task Force Addresses Legal Needs Arising From Coronavirus

Summary: ABA sets up a task force of volunteering legal experts to address legal needs that arise from coronavirus pandemic.



The American Bar Association has created a nationwide task force of volunteer judges and lawyers to assist 'ordinary' Americans with legal needs arising from the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic.

Described as 'The Task Force on Legal Needs Arising Out of the 2020 Pandemic' the initiative includes 20 representatives from top legal organizations in the United States and will work to recognize legal needs amid the pandemic as well as make recommendations to address those needs and mobilize legal professionals.

The task force is chaired by James J. Sandman, former president of the Legal Services Corporation, the largest funder of civil legal aid for low-income Americans. Sandman is also a former managing partner of Arnold & Porter LLP and past president of the District of Columbia Bar.

"As the pandemic spreads, thousands of Americans will need help – not just with medical issues but also with legal issues including lost jobs, evictions, insurance claims, family emergencies and obtaining government benefits they need to survive," said ABA President Judy Perry Martinez.

"Those who come before our criminal justice system will face additional challenges as jobs are lost, the inability to pay fines and fees escalates and we face a greater risk of detentions. In times of crisis, lawyers help. With this task force, we will start by looking for where the need is greatest and where we can make the biggest difference for people in dire situations."

Experts in disaster response, health law, insurance will be part of the task force to help with the legal needs of families and protect basic human rights such as medical and employment benefits, criminal justice, civil rights, and social justice.

The group will include representatives from The National Center for State Courts, The National Association of Bar Executives, The National Conference of Bar Presidents, The Legal Services Corporation, The National Legal Aid & Defender Association and sections and committees within the ABA.

The task force will continue the tradition of judges and lawyers volunteering their expertise to undertake emergencies across the nation. For example, the Disaster Legal Services Program of the ABA Young Lawyers Division has helped victims of 178 declared disasters in 44 states and four U.S. territories since 2007, the ABA reports.

"The ABA sets the standard for volunteer legal service in the United States," Martinez said. "The ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct recommended that every lawyer provide at least 50 hours a year of free service to people who are unable to pay. It is the highest calling of the legal profession, and with this pandemic, we are proud to offer our services again to our communities in need."