

Foundation Creates Hurricane Disaster Fund

by Jeanette Bazis



Jeanette Bazis is a partner at the Minneapolis law firm Greene Espel PLLP. A 1992 University of Minnesota Law School graduate and a former federal district court clerk, Bazis is a highly regarded litigator whose practice focuses on complex disputes that arise between businesses and their employees. She also merged her business and IP litigation skills to return the 1960's smash hit "Louie Louie" to its rightful owners. In 2012 and 2013, Minnesota Lawyer recognized Bazis as "Attorney of the Year" for her advancement of LGBTQ and gender equity.

The Foundation of the Federal Bar Association is committed to supporting disaster relief legal initiatives for the victims of devastation caused by this year's hurricanes. To that end, the foundation created a Hurricane Disaster Fund on Sept. 1 in the wake of Hurricane Harvey, followed in quick succession by Hurricanes Irma, Jose, and Maria. Generous donations to the fund from FBA friends and family across the country already exceed \$80,000.

The hurricanes upended the lives of FBA members, their families, and community members. Harvey left behind a trail of devastation in Texas, where the FBA has seven chapters. Florida is also recovering from hurricane damage, and two of our nine chapters in the state—Tampa and South Florida with more than 400 members each—experienced a treacherous storm season that affected the entire state. Puerto Rico, the third largest FBA chapter with more than 500 members, will be experiencing the ruinous impact of Hurricane Maria for years to come. Making landfall as a Category 4 storm, it was the worst hurricane to hit the island in more than 80 years.

The fund will support FBA chapters, sections, and divisions, as well as legal aid organizations that provide legal representation, advocacy, and education to impacted communities. Grants to eligible applicants will further the foundation's mission to promote and support legal research and education, advance the science of jurisprudence, facilitate the administration of justice, and foster improvements in the practice of federal law.

After careful research and vetting, the foundation's board of directors selected Lone Star Legal Aid and Texas RioGrande Legal Aid to be the first two grant recipients, with each receiving a \$15,000 grant. These organizations have fully operational staff on the ground working within their communities to provide legal assistance in the hardest hit areas of Texas.

"Both Texas organizations are actively assisting those impacted by Hurricane Harvey in Texas, providing services such as assisting with repair scams, defending against evictions, and appealing denials of FEMA aid and insurance claims," said Martha Hardwick Hofmeister, a member of the foundation board of directors. "The donations to the fund immediately went to work for many who have been critically impacted."

The board is committed to awarding similar grants to legal aid organizations and FBA chapters, sections, and divisions in Puerto Rico and Florida as well.

In a recent message to members of the FBA, Circuit Vice President Oreste Ramos of San Juan shared a firsthand account of conditions on the island and asked for continued support from the FBA family. "Although we need supplies, water, and food, I believe more focus should be given to impressing upon Congress and federal government officials that the residents of Puerto Rico, as American citizens, need Congress' and the administration's continued help to rebuild our infrastructure," Ramos wrote in an Oct. 4 email. "I exhort our FBA members to write to Congress asking it to support the rebuilding efforts, both long- and short-term, of our island's infrastructure.

"Our island cannot move from hurricane alley. It'll always be there. Due to our decade-long economic recession, Puerto Rico has experienced a massive exodus of productive citizens to the mainland, and if we are not able to return to normalcy soon, I am afraid that the exodus will only accelerate. Even though the island is blessed with natural beauty, it is its people that make Puerto Rico such a special place. And the people of Puerto Rico need a helping hand, now more than ever."

The Foundation invites FBA members, chapters, sections, divisions, and the larger legal community affected by hurricanes to apply for grants for disaster relief legal initiatives. Applications for grants may be downloaded at www.fedbar.org/foundation/hurricane-disaster-fund. The number of grants funded and the amount of each grant is dependent upon the available funding and the number and quality of applications. Grant applications will be evaluated as soon as received and processed as quickly as possible.

Donations to the Hurricanes Disaster Fund may be made online at www.fedbar.org or by check payable to the Foundation of the Federal Bar Association, 1220 North Fillmore St., Ste. 444, Arlington, VA 22201. Your donations will help to provide the necessary legal resources to affected citizens as they try to rebuild their lives. ☺