

Flood victims in Kentucky need all kinds of help for a long, long time

By Erin Bottomlee and Angeleigh Dorsey

Kentuckians know all too well that on any given day, any one in any community in America can find themselves unexpectedly living out their worst day. From wildfires to hurricanes to floods and tornadoes, no community is immune to disaster. The devastating July 2022 floods claimed 45 lives, destroyed thousands of homes, and displaced entire communities.

More than two years later, many survivors are still struggling — facing housing instability, FEMA denials, contractor fraud, and legal barriers that threaten their recovery. Now, after yet another catastrophic flood, at least 24 more of our neighbors have lost their lives, and countless others are left with nothing.

In moments like these, we are called to ask ourselves: What does it mean to truly love our neighbors? John 3:18 tells us: “Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.” In times of disaster, love in action means showing up. It means rebuilding. It means ensuring that no one is left behind.

That is why St. Vincent Mission and AppalReD Legal Aid stand together in service. St. Vincent Mission is on the ground, helping survivors muck out, rebuild, and regain stability. They provide clothing, food, and case support to those hit hardest—families, seniors, domestic violence survivors, and individuals with disabilities. But material aid alone is not enough. Without legal assistance, many of our most vulnerable neighbors risk slipping further into poverty and homelessness.

Legal services are just as essential as food, shelter, and medical aid. AppalReD Legal Aid’s Disaster Legal Services (DLS) team has already helped more than 1,000 survivors of the July 2022 floods. They guide families through the bureaucratic maze of FEMA applications, appeal denials, prevent contractor fraud, and defend the rights of those who have lost everything. Their work is a form of justice—a way to ensure that recovery is not only for the privileged but available to all.

Make no mistake — disaster legal services are not just about paperwork and procedures. They are about justice, fairness, and ensuring that those in our community who have lost everything have someone by their side during their time of greatest need. Recovery should not depend on what side of the creek you live on. It should not be left to chance. And most importantly, no one, especially the most vulnerable members of our communities, should be left to walk the road to recovery alone. This is why partnerships like those between AppalReD Legal Aid, St. Vincent Mission, and other faith-based organizations are vital. In times of crisis, we are called to stand together, to help bear one another's load, and to put love into action.

Angeleigh Dorsey is the Executive Director of AppalReD Legal Aid. AppalReD Legal Aid provides free civil legal services to the low-income and vulnerable in eastern and south-central Kentucky. Disaster survivors in need of civil legal help can call 1-844-478-0099.

Erin Bottomlee is the Executive Director of St. Vincent Mission. St. Vincent Mission is a community of people in Appalachia dedicated to sharing the expression of Christian Values in David, KY.

Read more at the Lexington Herald-Leader: <https://www.kentucky.com/opinion/oped/article302774489.html#storylink=cpy>

Last updated on March 28, 2025.

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