



NEWS RELEASE

Contacts:

Steve Ronfeldt, Esq.
The Public Interest Law Project
(510) 891-9794 x127 or (510) 402-8491
sronfeldt@pilpca.org

Marc Cohan, Esq.
Director of Litigation
National Center for Law and
Economic Justice
(212) 633-6967
cohan@nclej.org

Bradley Black, Esq.
Loyola University New Orleans College of Law
(504) 861-5787
beblack@loyno.edu

Dauida Finger, Esq.
Loyola University New Orleans College of Law
(504) 861-5596
dfinger@loyno.edu

Steven S. Cherensky, Esq.
WEIL, GOTSHAL & MANGES LLP
(650) 802-3000
steven.cherensky@weil.com

Adam P. Stochak, Esq.
WEIL, GOTSHAL & MANGES LLP
(202) 682-7000
adam.stochak@weil.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita File Class Action Lawsuit Against FEMA; Violations of Constitutional Due Process Rights Claimed: Hotline Established for Victims (504-861-5600)

April 19, 2007, New Orleans, LA — A group of low-income individuals displaced from their homes by Hurricane Katrina sued the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other Federal officials today in a class action lawsuit in Federal court in the Eastern District of Louisiana. These individuals have been terminated from FEMA's rental assistance program before being provided an opportunity to appeal the termination, in violation of their right to due process under the Fifth Amendment to the United States Constitution, placing them at risk of homelessness and increased poverty.

“Since these horrible storms nearly two years ago, FEMA's system of administering assistance has proven to be flawed time and time again, denying those most in need of vital aid,” said Steve Ronfeldt of the Public Interest Law Project, who represents the plaintiffs along with lawyers from the National Center For Law And Economic Justice, the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, Texas Appleseed, the Mississippi Center for Justice, the Legal Clinic at the Loyola University New Orleans College of Law, Steptoe & Johnson LLP and Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP. “Our goal in bringing this

lawsuit is to compel FEMA to comply with the requirements of the Constitution by providing individuals displaced by Hurricanes Katrina or Rita, as well as victims of future disasters, with clear notification of the reasons why they are denied continued housing assistance and a fair opportunity to challenge FEMA's decisions before they lose the assistance that is so critical their ability to pay for housing," said Ronfeldt.

More specifically, the lawsuit contends that FEMA operates an unresponsive system of administrative review and issues termination notices that are confusing and contain little more than undecipherable acronyms, and that FEMA has failed to publish standards setting forth the eligibility requirements.

"FEMA is charged with providing assistance to people in their greatest moment of need, but it has failed many of the neediest by cloaking its decision-making in bureaucratic double-speak and cutting off vital housing assistance before recipients have a fair opportunity to be heard," said Adam Stochak of Weil Gotshal. "For those whose existence is almost entirely dependent on this organization and the assistance it provides until their homes and lives are rebuilt, this is unacceptable."

Also challenged in the suit are FEMA's practices regarding recovery of alleged overpayments to aid recipients. The lawsuit alleges FEMA violates the Constitution by failing to provide aid recipients with clear notice of the reasons why it is seeking repayment of assistance and by terminating or withholding continued rental assistance before recipients are given an opportunity to dispute FEMA's demands for repayment.

Persons displaced by Hurricanes Katrina or Rita who have been denied continued rental assistance by FEMA may call a hotline established at the Loyola University New Orleans College of Law to speak with local counsel about the lawsuit. The number is 504-861-5600.
