



/ Disaster Resilience Program

Lawyers play a critical role in helping communities prepare for and recover from disasters.

Disasters devastate lower-income communities, creating new poverty and further entrenching inequality. In the wake of any disaster, families often need the assistance of a lawyer to overcome barriers to recovery. Lawyers uncover patterns of exploitation and bring litigation or advocate for policy change, helping to ensure a just recovery.

But it's not enough only to respond to disasters after they occur. The frequency and severity of disasters continues to rise, and lawyers play a critical role in improving preparedness by working with community members and leaders to avoid or mitigate disaster-related legal challenges. **The unprecedented crisis of COVID-19 has heightened the level of uncertainty and disparity for marginalized communities at the same time as it has restricted access to essential social services.** We are seeing in real-time the need for both preparedness and rapid response.

Our country faces a critical shortage of qualified lawyers committed to working in lower-income communities to prepare for and respond to the unique legal challenges arising from all kinds of disasters. **The Equal Justice Works Disaster Resilience Program addresses this problem.**



At Greater Houston Community Foundation, we believe in the power of collaboration to make Houston a more vibrant and equitable region. We are proud to have supported Equal Justice Works in its innovative efforts to mobilize lawyers to deliver critical legal services to help rebuild communities and lives affected by Hurricane Harvey. Thanks to the hard work of these lawyers, more people in the Greater Houston area and the Gulf Coast now have access to the legal services they need to prepare for and recover from disasters.

RENEE WIZIG-BARRIOS / Senior Vice President, Chief Philanthropy Officer
Greater Houston Community Foundation

Since 2005, Equal Justice Works has mobilized more than 80 passionate public service lawyers to deliver legal services to disaster-affected communities. Our Fellows have responded to Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Maria, Sandy, Ike, Katrina, and Rita; Tropical Storm Imelda; flooding in the Gulf Coast; tornadoes in Missouri and Oklahoma; and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Equal Justice Works places legal Fellows and law students at legal services organizations to build capacity to respond to increasing demand for disaster legal aid. Our program provides ongoing in-person and virtual trainings, iterative evaluations, and effective tools for collaboration to ensure that together, our Fellows are an effective force tackling disaster-related legal needs. Our Fellows and law students address the critical legal needs that lower-income families face before, during, and after a disaster, including:

- Securing disaster benefits, including appealing wrongful FEMA denials
- Challenging unlawful evictions, public housing displacement, and exploitation by private landlords
- Preventing or addressing foreclosures
- Clearing property titles to establish eligibility for disaster assistance
- Replacing important legal documents such as wills and advance directives
- Tackling insurance claim disputes, consumer price gouging, and other insurance claim scams
- Addressing the unique needs of individuals with disabilities during times of disaster
- Ensuring that children and families have an advocate to support a safe home

BY THE NUMBERS

Equal Justice Works mobilized 20 legal Fellows to deliver critical legal assistance to communities affected by hurricanes and tropical storms in Texas and Florida. From 2017 to 2019, these Fellows:

Provided legal information to

25,481

individuals

Assisted

16,423

households with legal services

Secured

\$2M+

in economic benefits

FOR MORE
INFORMATION

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ABOUT EQUAL JUSTICE WORKS /

Equal Justice Works is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and is the nation's largest facilitator of opportunities in public interest law. Equal Justice Works brings together an extensive network of law students, lawyers, legal services organizations, and supporters to promote a lifelong commitment to public service and equal justice. The organization believes that a community of lawyers committed to public service can fulfill our nation's promise of equal justice for all. Following their Fellowships, more than 85% of Equal Justice Works Fellows remain in public service positions, continuing to pursue equal justice for underserved communities.