

PREFACE

After the devastation of Hurricane Andrew in South Florida in 1992, the state enjoyed a twelve year respite in serious hurricane damage. This lull came to a crashing halt with the arrival of Hurricanes Charley, Jeanne, Frances, and Ivan in 2004, which hit or threatened almost all of Florida, but brought particular devastation to the East and West Coasts, Central Florida and the Panhandle. The lull was then put to rest for the foreseeable future by Hurricanes Dennis and Wilma in 2005 and the “expert” predictions of increased hurricane activities for the foreseeable years. Wilma also demonstrated that it doesn’t take a category four or five storm to do serious damage to the physical capacities of legal aid programs and low income housing. The overwhelming tragedy of Katrina in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama and the revelations of lack of government and resident preparedness and the incompetence of government recovery efforts highlights the vulnerability of low income communities in Florida.

The recent resumption of hurricane fury revealed anew that while all sectors of communities experiencing hurricanes can suffer mightily, it is low income families and the elderly whose lives are often devastated, sometimes lost and forever changed, both by the hurricane damage itself and the lack of effective government preparedness and recovery programs. As a new awareness of the long-term effect of hurricanes on housing for low income families and elderly unfolds, a re-energized resolve to combat such effects has emerged in the legal assistance community in Florida. Thus, after the

2004 hurricane season, Florida's legal assistance for the poor community and The Florida Bar Foundation undertook the preparation of this manual with annual updates and disaster assistance training, emphasizing preparedness of legal assistance programs to ensure that they can provide post disaster representation to clients, individual and systemic. Major expansion and updating of this manual were completed for the 2006 hurricane season, with further updating and expansion for 2007.

The goal of this manual, and the training which accompanies it, is to enable the legal assistance community to be prepared for disasters and to effectively and quickly respond to the legal needs of low income families and communities.