



Serving the Public. Serving the Profession.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 6, 2010

LSBA, La. Civil Justice Center Establish Hotline Services for BP Explosion/Oil Spill Victims

NEW ORLEANS—The Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA) and the Louisiana Civil Justice Center (LCJC) have joined forces once again in the establishment of a free consumer assistance hotline for victims of the BP Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion on April 20, and the subsequent oil spill inching closer to Louisiana's coastline.

Today, LSBA President Kim M. Boyle said the LCJC hotline's increased viability is in direct response to the rising number of complaints regarding improper solicitation of victims by both Louisiana and out-of-state attorneys in the aftermath of this disaster.

"We want Louisiana's citizens to be armed with the knowledge about Louisiana's legal system and attorneys' duties and responsibilities within that system, specifically the proper conduct that attorneys must adhere to in the area of client solicitation following accidents and disasters," Boyle said.

To aid in the education of the citizenry, the LCJC's intake specialists will begin fielding calls seeking general information about the Louisiana Rules of Professional Conduct, which govern attorneys in their daily practices, said LCJC Executive Director Patricia A. Garcia.

The LCJC's hotline can be accessed at (504)355-0970 or (800)310-7029, Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Assistance also is available to Spanish-speaking callers.

Boyle, Garcia, Louisiana's Chief Disciplinary Counsel Charles B. Plattsmier, Louisiana Association for Justice President Donald W. Price, Louisiana Commercial Fishermen's Association President George Barasich and Louisiana State Police Public Affairs Unit Supervisor Lt. Doug Cain joined forces today to discuss various legal aspects of the recent disaster, following reports that have reached legal entities about the improper behavior by some lawyers in soliciting legal business.

"While tragic circumstances often bring out the very best in our profession, it is also true that there are those who will view this disaster primarily as an opportunity for personal gain and economic enrichment," Plattsmier said, briefly outlining for the public's knowledge solicitation practices that are prohibited.

In cases of accidents or disasters, the Louisiana Rules of Professional Conduct prohibit attorneys from initiating direct-mail communications within 30 days of the incident. Solicitation of employment through unwanted personal visits or telephone calls by an attorney with whom a person has had no prior association, or someone

more

LSBA, La. Civil Justice Center Establish Hotline Services Add 1

acting on an attorney's behalf, violates the Rules. Solicitations involving coercion, duress, harassment, fraud, intimidation or undue influence are prohibited.

"We want to alert the public to this information and suggest that citizens who are targeted step back and make their decisions about legal matters only after careful, deliberate reflection. We also seek to remove the unfair playing field that may hamper Louisiana lawyers who are, indeed, adhering to the Rules," Boyle said.

Anyone who becomes the target of unethical or illegal solicitation or any other violation of the Louisiana Rules of Professional Conduct should contact the Office of Disciplinary Counsel at 1-800-326-8022.

Barasich, as president of the Louisiana Commercial Fishermen's Association and on the front lines in the fight to save Louisiana's coastline and fishing industry, summed up the importance of the Louisiana legal community's efforts in this current disaster. "We have enough problems," he said. "With y'all watching our backs, we can do our real work of helping prevent this oil from going to the estuaries. Thank you."

The Louisiana State Bar Association assists its more than 20,000 members in the practice of law. The statewide association, as part of its multi-faceted mission, promotes and maintains access to justice initiatives for the state's residents, assists the Louisiana Supreme Court in its regulation of the practice of law, upholds the honor of the courts and the profession, and supports programs that increase public understanding of and respect for the law.

###