

Enhancing Child Welfare Legal and Judicial Responses to Jurisdictions Affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita



After the Storms: A Discussion Forum

In August and September 2005, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita caused devastating damage to states along the Gulf Coast. Many judges, court personnel, child welfare workers, and services providers in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana responded heroically. States, most notably Texas, welcomed those families and children displaced from the Gulf Coast.

But in the wake of these disasters, questions have been raised about the safety and services provided to the children in foster care. Immediate concerns included the destruction of records, movement of personnel and families, issues of confidentiality, inability to communicate effectively. Additionally, judges, court personnel, child welfare workers, and service providers continued to work and meet the needs of children and families while facing overwhelming personal and property losses. Rebuilding is a longer and slower process than first imagined, and the press is no longer highlighting issues, concerns, or successes.

With support from the Department of Health and Human Services, the American Bar Association, National Center for State Courts, and National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges are working in partnership with jurisdictions affected by Hurricanes Rita and Katrina to develop and implement in relief projects such as conducting needs assessments, contacting and networking with NCJFCJ member judges, providing technical assistance, supporting training, strategic planning with judges and court teams, providing topical information on our websites and in publications, and drafting publications and manuals for courts' disaster planning.

As part of these efforts, the NCJFCJ is sponsoring discussion forums for judges, court staff, attorneys, caseworkers, service providers, and others working with abused and neglected children and their families in jurisdictions affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. **If you live or work in a jurisdiction which suffered damage, or if you are in a**

jurisdiction which is serving evacuees, please accept our invitation to register and join the discussion forum.

Please click the hurricane banner entitled "After the Storms: A Discussion Forum" on the NCJFCJ home page at www.ncjfcj.org to reach the forum or go directly to www.ncjfcj.org/forums to join the discussion. We would like to hear about your rebuilding efforts, the challenges you have overcome and your successes in serving children and families affected by the hurricanes.