

# **Supreme Court works to identify trial court needs, encourages free legal services for victims of Hurricane Katrina, and extends filing deadlines in appeals**

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Mississippi Supreme Court Chief Justice James W. Smith Jr. said on Wednesday that his primary focus is assessing damage at courthouse across south Mississippi. A Damage Assessment Committee will start with courthouses in Hancock, Harrison, Jackson and Stone counties.

Supreme Court Justice James E. Graves Jr. leads the committee which includes Court of Appeals Presiding Judge L. Joseph Lee, Supreme Court Clerk Betty Sephton, Information Systems Director Michael Jones and Administrative Office of Courts Director Kevin Lackey.

Chief Justice Smith said, "We have gotten many offers from out of state courts to help us with this problem. We have to know first what we need, where to send it, and how to get it there."

The Mississippi Supreme Court issued an order Wednesday addressing free legal services to victims of Hurricane Katrina. The Supreme Court has also issued a series of administrative orders extending appellate and bar disciplinary filing deadlines as a result of delays created by Hurricane Katrina.

The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed that all free legal services provided by lawyers to victims of Hurricane Katrina may be credited toward satisfying professional obligations to provide pro bono services. Pro bono assistance is defined under Rule 6.1 of the Rules of Professional Conduct for lawyers as free legal assistance to the poor. The Supreme Court in an order on Wednesday said that any free legal assistance to victims of Hurricane Katrina would count as pro bono service.

An order signed Wednesday by Chief Justice Smith said, "The Court, en banc, at the request of the Mississippi Bar, has recognized the serious need for legal assistance to victims of hurricane Katrina, regardless of whether those victims fall within the scope of those recipients defined in Rule 6.1."

The Supreme Court on Wednesday extended appellate filing deadlines until Sept. 12 for lawyers who missed filing deadlines while the Supreme Court was closed between Aug. 29 and Sept. 5. The Sept. 12 deadline applies to appellate cases originating from trial courts in the First (Central) and Third (Northern) Supreme Court Districts.

The Supreme Court on Tuesday, Sept. 6, granted a longer 90-day extension of deadlines in appeals from the Second (Southern) Supreme Court District that includes coastal counties. The Second Supreme Court District is made up of Adams, Amite, Clarke, Covington, Forrest, Franklin, George, Greene, Hancock, Harrison, Jackson, Jasper, Jefferson Davis, Jones, Lamar, Lawrence, Lincoln, Marion, Pearl River, Perry, Pike, Simpson, Smith, Stone, Walthall, Wayne and Wilkinson counties. Oral arguments were cancelled and will be rescheduled for appeals pending from those counties.

The Supreme Court in an order entered on Tuesday authorized trial court judges in the 27 Second Supreme Court District counties to use their discretion to extend deadlines and reschedule proceedings.

The Supreme Court also issued an order Wednesday extending filing deadlines for 30 days in attorney disciplinary proceedings involving attorneys whose offices or homes are within the Second Supreme Court District.

Chief Justice Smith stated, "The court is attempting to address all problems promptly as they arise from the bar and the judiciary."

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**Media Contact: Beverly Pettigrew Kraft, Administrative Office of Courts, 601-354-7452**