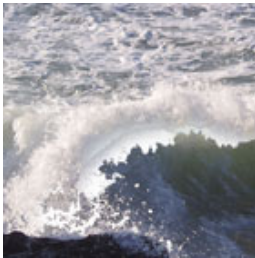


New Orleans' Legal System Still Feeling Pain of Hurricane Katrina

By Amy E. Wong



It hit about a year-and-a-half ago, but the devastation of Hurricane Katrina is still rocking New Orleans, especially its legal system.

Brian Privor, lawyer at Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, told [Law.com](http://www.law.com), "Because of the logistical realities of the post-Katrina world, it's certainly more difficult for both the prosecution and the defense to work their way through the court system." Witnesses have moved away, and evidence has been destroyed.

Privor continued, "It's slower, there are fewer personnel and sheriffs to oversee the inmates, fewer lawyers to go around and talk to them, the accommodations are not as accommodating, copies of police reports don't show up like they used to—everything is just more challenging with the very first appearance in the court system."

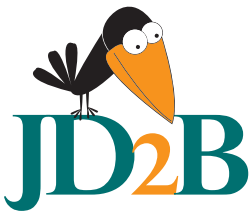
Because of the lack of funding and staff, clients are just processed, not represented. To add salt to the wound, almost 12,000 Katrina-related lawsuits (mostly against insurance companies) were filed in 2006. This is triple the number of suits that Louisiana would normally encounter on an annual basis. It'll take years to deal with all these suits.

According to recent reports by the U.S. Department of Justice, Louisiana's Public Defender's Office requires 70 full-time lawyers and additional support staff. (Only about half the public defenders have been hired.) It will take \$10.7 million to operate the office during its first year and \$8.2 million in subsequent years.

To alleviate the monetary burden, the Justice Department divvied up \$61 million in grants and funds to rebuild the justice and law enforcement systems. Additionally, they are hiring additional Assistant U.S. Attorneys.

The destruction has necessitated a reconstruction, and some are warily optimistic about this opportunity to start anew.

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Denise LeBoeuf, Chairwoman of the board overseeing New Orleans' Public Defender's Office, told *Law.com*, "I think this is going to be a destination office for young lawyers who want to do public defense in the years to come."

Pamela Metzger, associate professor at Tulane University Law School voiced a similar notion, saying, "We're in the midst of a revolutionary process. I do believe that at the end of the day—10, 20 years down the line—at least in the area of public defense, we're creating a model for what public defense can become."