

City of Deltona FL

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Florida Attorneys Saving Homes (FLASH)

TALLAHASSEE- In a massive effort to assist Floridians fight back against the foreclosure crisis that has the state ranked No. 2 in the nation, The Florida Bar, The Florida Bar Foundation, Florida Legal Services Inc. and the Real Property Probate and Trust Law Section of The Florida Bar, almost 10,503 strong, are ready to do battle to help Florida homeowners.

"We believe this is the first project of its kind that pairs homeowners with volunteer attorneys before the foreclosure is started in an effort to hold back the flood of foreclosures," said Kent Spuhler, executive director of Florida Legal Services.

Sandra Fascell Diamond, chair of the Real Property Probate and Trust Law Section of The Florida Bar, said: "CFO Alex Sink asked for the help of The Florida Bar to address the avalanche of foreclosures facing Florida homeowners. The Real Property Probate and Trust Law Section is pleased to have the opportunity to assist with the coordination of the efforts of volunteer attorneys in this task. We hope to help individual owners and their families find a way to keep their homes."

As of June 6, an estimated 77,000 Floridians were in foreclosure. A recent report indicated that 11.6 percent of Florida property owners were more than 30 days past due on a mortgage payment or in foreclosure, suggesting more trouble ahead.

The Statewide effort called FLASH (Florida Attorneys Saving Homes) has launched a toll-free hot line (866-607-2187) and will take calls from 8 a.m. through 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Callers who fear that they soon won't be able to make their mortgage payments or who have already missed payments but are not yet in foreclosure are urged to call. Hot line callers will answer a few initial questions to ensure accurate placement with pro bono attorneys, who will then negotiate with lenders on behalf of homeowners. The hope is to create a relationship in which the lender and the homeowner can together create a loan that allows the homeowner to remain in the home and avoid foreclosure - a win-win situation for all involved.

"The concept for the project began with the announcement from the banking industry of their HOPE NOW and Project Lifeline Projects," Spuhler said. "We felt homeowners having trouble with their mortgage would have better success negotiating with their lender if they had the assistance of an attorney."

For more information on FLASH, contact Dionne L. Meyers, FLASH coordinator at Florida Legal Services, at (850) 385-7900, ext. 1828, or e-mail dionne@floridalegal.org.

Lawyers interested in volunteering should visit the pro bono Web site at <http://www.floridaprobono.org/>.