



AACPLL

*access to justice
through
access to legal information*

Report of the

Anne Arundel
County Public
Law Library

FISCAL YEAR
2021

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Anne Arundel County Public Law Library

Anne Arundel County Circuit Court

July 2020 – June 2021

Vision access to justice through access to legal information

Mission The Anne Arundel County Public Law Library serves the needs of Anne Arundel County's court, attorneys, government and citizens by providing access to legal information resources; promoting access to these resources; creating educational opportunities that enhance the understanding of legal information; and providing access to programs providing legal advice to the public.

Introduction

The law library kept to its vision providing access to justice through access to legal information while facing the challenges of COVID.

This report provides a picture of library use, programs, resources, services, staff and finances. The strategic plan with goals and actions taken is included.

Use Statistics FY2021



1788 visitors



2565 questions



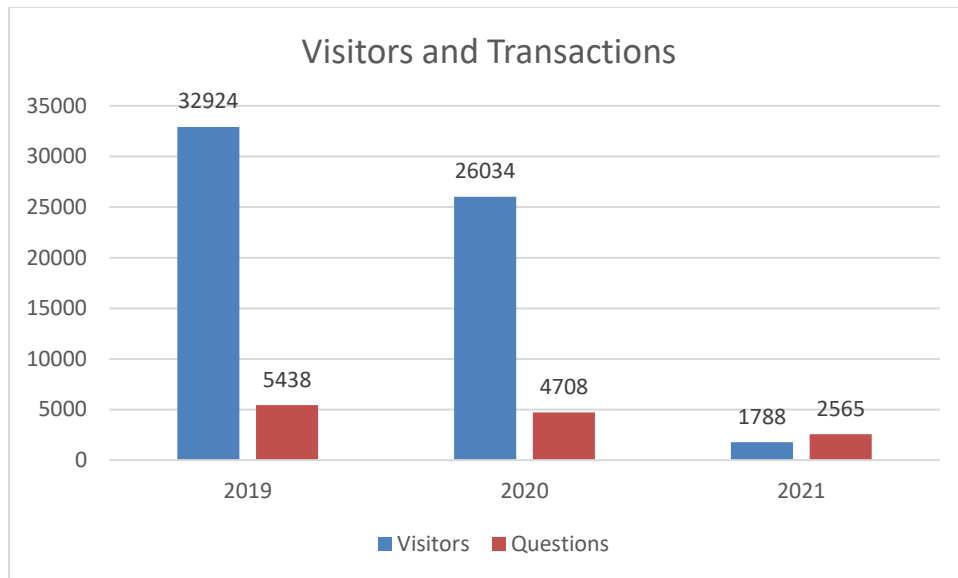
28,575 web hits



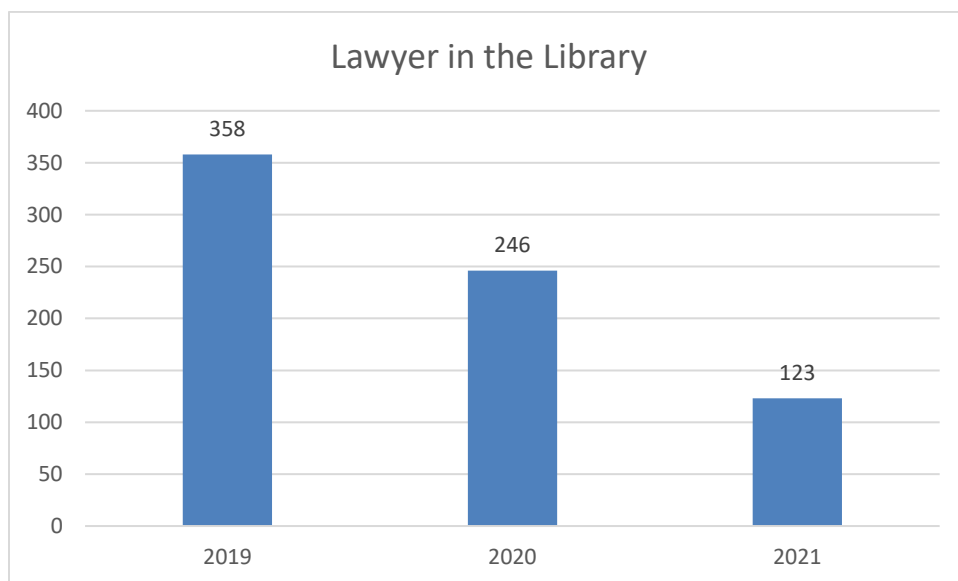
123 served by law library
self-help legal advice programs

FY2021 statistics reflect a dramatic change in the law library's use especially in terms of in-person visitors and number of overall transactions.

Limited access to the court and remote hearings were obvious factors in the decrease in library visitors. The library's relocation without close proximity to the Family Law Help Center was another. FLHC traffic accounted for a large number of library visitors and transactions. When the FLHC was co-located in the law library, librarians were able to provide reference and referrals and technology assistance to the Center's clients. The distance between the FLHC and law library made those encounters less frequent.



In-person visits decreased by 94% when compared with pre-COVID numbers in FY2019. In-person transactions fell by 69%. Average in-person visits went from an average of 137 per day in FY2019 to 8 per day in FY2021.



The Lawyer in the Library program assisted 67% fewer people when compared to pre-COVID numbers. The limited legal advice program was held weekly in the law library and monthly at the Eastport and Glen Burnie public libraries before COVID. The program converted to a remote format at the end of FY2020 and continued

through FY2021. Technology proved to be a barrier for some – participants and attorney volunteers.

Online access remained steady with a slight increase in library related web hits. Online catalog searches increased by 47%.

FY2021 - Who



79%
Public



16%
Attorneys



5%
Judiciary

The breakdown of library users showed a slight increase in the percentage of attorney use since FY2020 and a corresponding drop in public use. Typically, attorneys require less assistance than the public. However, online research and remote services would explain this increase in attorney assistance.

FY 2021 - How



57%
In Person



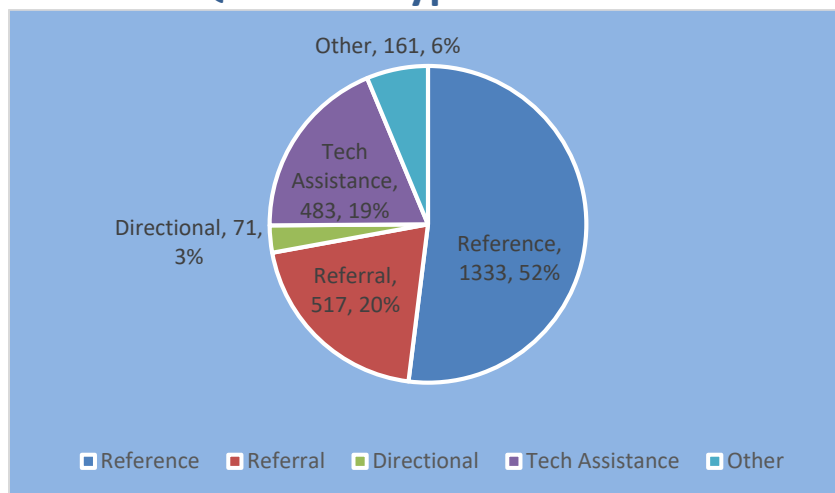
31%
Phone



12%
Email

The decrease in library visitors resulted in a drop of in-person transactions. Remote assistance increased accordingly with phone assistance up by 175% and email assistance up by 286% since FY2019. Total numbers still did not meet those of previous years.

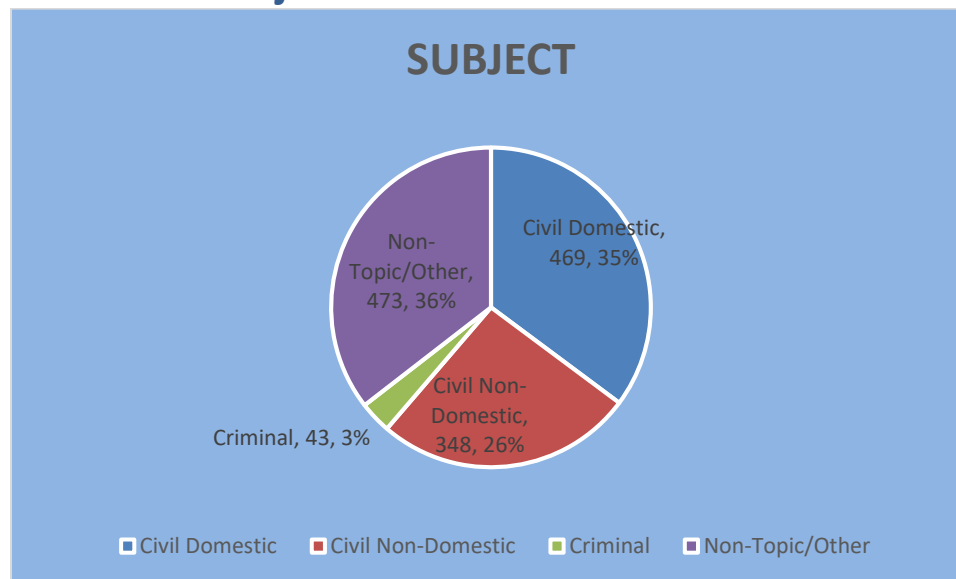
FY2021 - Question Type



**72% OF QUESTIONS
INVOLVE REFERENCE
& REFERRALS**

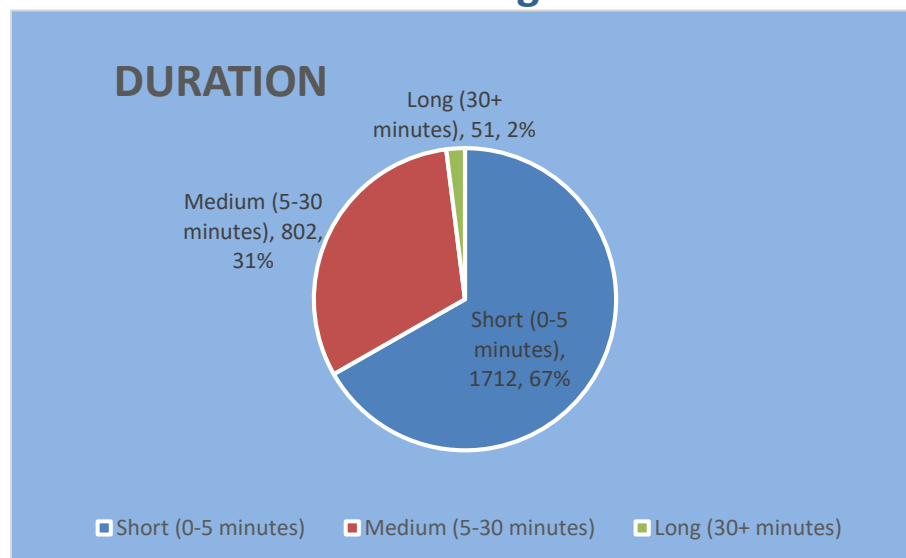
The percentage of the types of questions remained close to the percentages of previous years.

FY2021 – Subject Matter



71% OF
QUESTIONS ARE CIVIL

FY2021 - Transaction Length



67% OF
TRANSACTIONS
TAKE 5
MINUTES OR
LESS

The percentage of short transactions decreased to 67% from 78% in FY2019. Remote assistance did not provide the opportunity for many short interactions such as how to access a PC or sign-in to the FLHC. The number of long interactions, those taking 30 minutes or more increased by 292% when compared with FY2019 going from just 12 in FY2019 to 51 in FY2021 – an average of one long interaction per month in FY2019 to one per week in FY2021. Remote reference transactions take longer with email due to the inability for a

simultaneous interactive conversation. It is more difficult to demonstrate resources remotely as well.

During this time of COVID the library delivered the same level of quality information services but to fewer people. The COVID emergency brought about a number of legal issues in addition to the health consequences. Access to legal information is an essential service needed by those negotiating critical legal issues involving housing and employment resulting from the COVID emergency.

Law Library Move

COVID-19 presented many challenges for the court. The resumption of jury trials in October of 2020 and the need to social distance jurors directly affected the law library. The law library proved to be the only space that could accommodate the anticipated jurors in a safe manner. As a result, the law library moved to the lawyers' lounge.

On short notice the law library devised a plan for downsizing the collection and moving to the new, temporary location. The law library had already converted much of the general U.S. collection to a digital format with the plan that library users would gradually adjust from the print by updating research with the online. However, this process could not go as planned and the transition took place in less than a month. Although in a much smaller space, library users still have access to the same titles as before using online databases such as Westlaw and Lexis.



The Anne Arundel County Public Law Library - before

- 7748 sq ft
- 6048 linear feet of shelf space
- 2643 titles
- 26,003 volumes
- 13 public PCs
- 2 conference rooms
- 1 computer room
- Family Law Self-Help Center



AACPLL - after

- 648 sq ft
- 584 linear feet of shelf space
- 750 titles
- 3847 volumes
- 4 public PCs
- 0 conference rooms
- 0 computer room
- Family Law Self-Help Center in a separate location

See more about the move [here](#).

Looking to a new space in the future, the law library has devised a plan for a library that will meet the needs of all library users.

Cataloging Project

Close to 1900 titles were discarded before the move. Some titles were no longer current, but many were to be continued as digital or e-resources. The catalog records for the discarded titles had to be either deleted or converted to e-resource records. Sarah Green has worked diligently to get it done so that all library resources are discoverable in the [library online catalog](#).

Previously, the catalog only contained records for the secondary sources. Sarah is now working to add records for all primary sources, current and historic.

Library Services

When the court limited access to the building in March 2020, the law library provided remote service via phone and email. Remote services continue to be available to those who do not need or want to visit the court in-person. Copies of requested information was (and still can be) sent via email. For requests for information that is not available online such as legislative history information, the librarian can scan and email the needed sections.


Westlaw and Lexis access was made available through the publishers and distributed upon request by the law library. Online research sessions using screen sharing allows users to search databases with librarian assistance in real time.

The law library created a [Virtual Reference Desk](#) for easy access to remote library services. Library space is limited making remote service a good option even with the court fully open.

The legal information needs of the law library's diverse user groups are varied.

The law library serves the **court** with:

- Research assistance
- Management of chambers resources
- Maintenance of information resource SharePoint site
- Westlaw password and Lexis E-book access
- Maintenance of the chambers reserve collection
- Circulation of legal texts and treatises
- Law clerk orientation (social distanced)



"Thank you so much - I really appreciate your assistance."

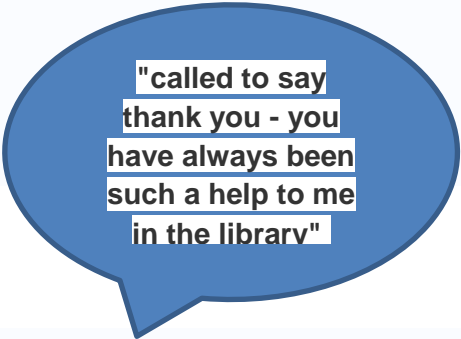


Questions and requests from the Court -

- *How do I get a Westlaw password?*
- *Maryland books on evidence?*
- *I need the legislative history for a section of Maryland Code first passed in 1980.*
- *Where are the jury instructions online?*
- *How can I access Fader's ebook?*
- *Did this bill pass this session?*

The law library serves the **bar** with:

- Research assistance
- Legal research training and instruction
- Online query formulation
- Westlaw password distribution
- Research co-browsing
- Document delivery
- Technology and MDEC assistance
- Pro bono coordination
- Circulation of legal texts and treatises



"called to say thank you - you have always been such a help to me in the library"

Questions and requests from the Bar –

- *Where can I find books on guardianship?*
- *I need the zoning code as it was in 1969.*
- *Sample will and deed for a life estate*
- *MDEC access?*
- *Does the library have a Pennsylvania formbook?*
- *Help me find a sample power of attorney.*
- *Does the library have access to a jury verdict data base?*

The law library serves the **public** with:

- Research assistance
- Legal research training and instruction
- Legal services referrals
- Technology and MDEC assistance
- Access to self-help resources
- Curated online information
- Legal advice programs
- Access to the MCHC (Maryland Court Help Center)
- Templates



I just called to thank you from the bottom of my heart - you don't get that all the time - really appreciate you finding help for me and my granddaughter (referral to Maryland Disability Rights)

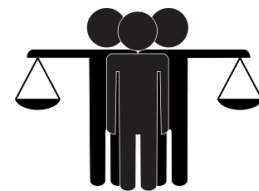
Questions and requests from the Public –

- *Judge sent me here for an answer form.*
- *What is discovery?*
- *How can I print this article?*
- *What can I do about my neighbor's tree?*
- *How can I expunge my record?*
- *I am looking for my divorce papers – I don't do well with a computer.*
- *How do you appeal an MVA decision?*
- *How can I print all of these text messages at once?*

The law library developed email FAQ templates for family law and civil issues to more efficiently respond to the remote requests of self-represented litigants. The templates provide links to the Wiki FAQs as well as legal assistance referrals. The templates can also be used to provide contactless access to information to in-person library users.

[Wiki FAQs](#) contain links to the law, online articles, forms and videos, as well as lists of print material in the library pertaining to topics that are most often asked by the public. The FAQs are a part of the [AACPLL Self Help and Pro Bono WIKI](#).

Access to Justice Initiatives



Brief Legal Advice Services

[Lawyer in the Library](#) provides the opportunity to consult with a volunteer lawyer for at least 20 minutes about civil, non-family legal issues for free. The program continues to be offered remotely, every Wednesday from 11:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. and on the third Wednesday from 4:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.

The Lawyer in the Library program began remote service with SKYPE and then transitioned to TEAMS. Now through a partnership with Anne Arundel Public Library branches the program is offered via Zoom.

AABA President's Pro Bono Award

The Anne Arundel Bar Association reinstituted the President's pro Bono Award at the request of the Local Pro Bono Committee in 2016. The law librarian creates an online nomination form used for the award. Award recipients are listed [here](#).

Anne Arundel Pro Bono Committee

The law library supports the work of the Pro Bono Committee by maintaining information pages on the [AACPLL Self Help and Pro Bono WIKI](#). Information there includes meeting minutes and reports.

A large, blue speech bubble with a tail pointing towards the bottom left. Inside the bubble, a testimonial is written in white text on a black background, which is itself on a white background. The text reads: "Wow, that was wonderful! Thank you so much for providing this service. The attorney gave great guidance".

"Wow, that was wonderful! Thank you so much for providing this service. The attorney gave great guidance"

Staff

Law library staff consisted of the Law Library Director and one full time contractual position. (With the retirement of Nancy Wallace in 2011, the law library lost its permanent assistant law librarian position. The law library was then allotted one contractual FTE position.) The contractual position is shared by Denise Wolf and Sarah Green.

There have been thirteen different people in the assistant law librarian position in the ten years since the permanent position became contractual. Ever-changing staff requires extensive and ongoing training requirements. These training periods adversely affect law library productivity and service as do periods without any support staff. The law library worked most efficiently with two full-time positions and the one part-time position that was funded by the now discontinued Maryland State Law Library Grant program. There were no backlogs and most always at least two staff members were available in the law library. Reinstatement of the Assistant Librarian position would improve library productivity and service.

Staff Highlights

Joan Bellistri continued to work with Catherine McGuire, Head of Reference and Outreach at the Thurgood Marshall State Law Library, and Reena Shah, Executive Director of the Maryland Access to Justice Commission to provide legal reference training to public librarians with presentations of “Law on the Frontlines: Resources for Public Library Reference.” Trainings included basic and advanced topics.

Joan Bellistri developed an in-house online Legal Reference Training Program for library staff using Microsoft forms.

Professional Participation, Presentations, and Publications

Memberships – Joan Bellistri

- Conference of Maryland Court Law Library Directors, member 2007 – present (Chair, 2007-2009)
- Anne Arundel County Local Pro Bono Committee, member, (Chair, 7/2011 – 6/2015)
- Maryland Judicial Council Court Access and Community Relations Committee,
 - Self-Represented Litigant Subcommittee (2015 - present)

- Maryland Court of Appeals Standing Committee on Pro Bono Legal Service, Public Member, 05/12/2010 - present
 - Liaison to Anne Arundel County Local Pro Bono Committee
- Pro Bono Coordinating Council, member, 2013 - present
- LLAM (Law Library Association of Maryland) Member, 1982- present
 - GRC\Vendor Relations, Chair, 2006 - present
- Maryland Library Association, Member
 - LLAM Representative on the Legislative Panel, 2005 - present
- GLL (Government Law Libraries, American Association of Law Libraries Special Interest Section) Member, 1980- present
 - Chair, Nominations Committee, 2020-2021
 - Chair, 2018-2019
- LISP (Legal Information Services to the Public, American Association of Law Libraries Special Interest Section) Member, 1996-present
- Self-Represented Litigation Network, Member, December 2008 -present
 - Law Librarians Working Group, Member, 2008- present (Chair, 2012-2013)
- Entrepreneur Academy Community Partners with Anne Arundel County Public Library and Prince George's Memorial Library, member 4/2021 – present
- Access to Justice Commission Public Library Training Planning Group, 2016 - present
- Maryland Attorney General Access to Justice Task Force Public Awareness and Community Engagement Committee, member, 2020 – 2021

Memberships – Sarah Green

- Special Library Association – Maryland Community, Member, 2014 – present, Secretary (2020 -2021)
- LLAM (Law Library Association of Maryland) Member, 2020- present

Presentations

- “Law on the Frontlines: Resources for Public Library Reference,” Speaker, Maryland Library Association/Delaware Library Association Conference, October 2020 and Montgomery County Public Library Series, Fall 2020

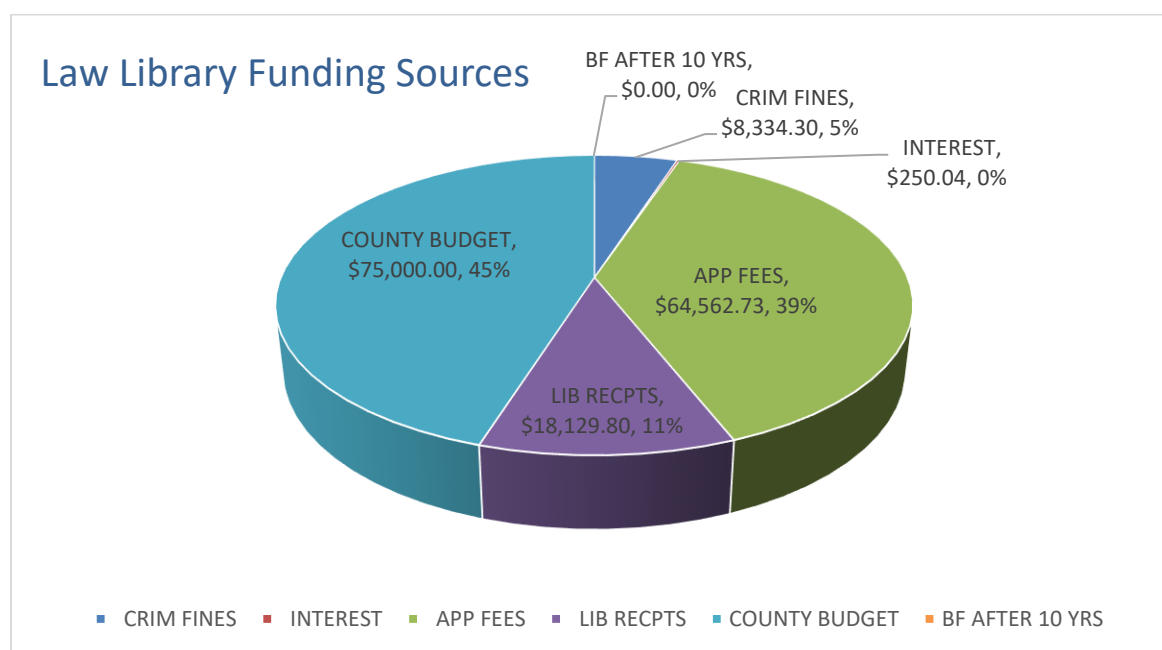
Publications

- “2021 SLA MD Community Survey” by Sarah Green and Brynne Norton
- “Evaluating Library Services to Self-Represented Litigants: A Story of Two Surveys - SRLN Report 2021 No. 1 (March 2021)” Joan Bellistri and Sara Galligan

Law Library Financial Report FY2021

Funding

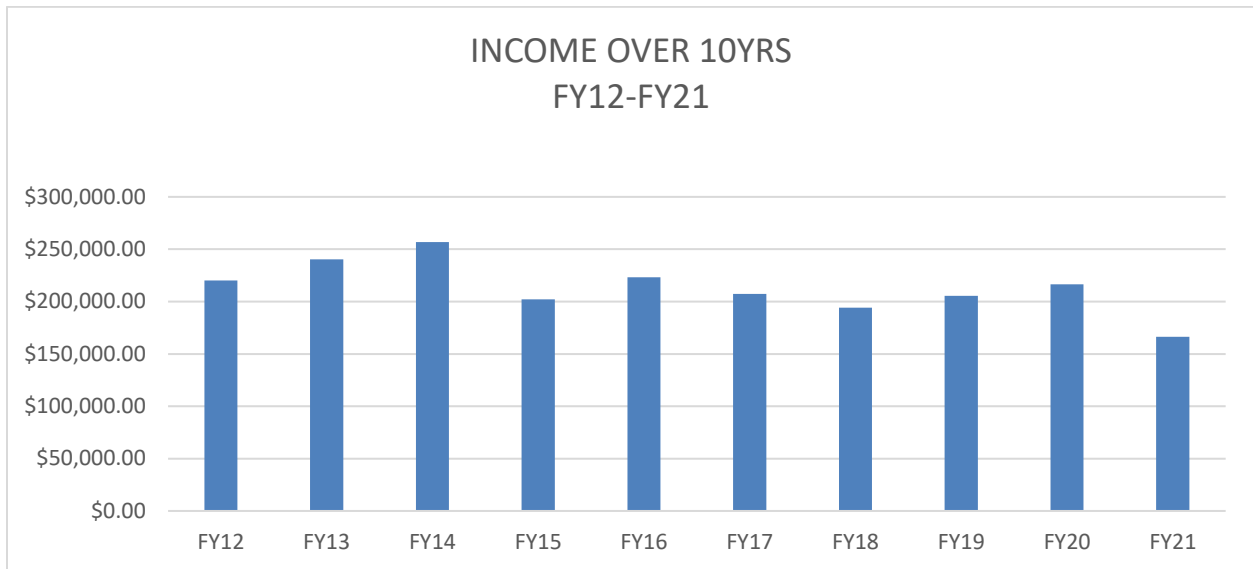
The law library is funded by a budget appropriation, appearance fees, criminal fines, bond forfeitures held beyond ten years and miscellaneous library receipts that include copies, print fees, fax charges, used book sale receipts, and court reporter charges for CDs. Many of the library's funding sources can be unpredictable.



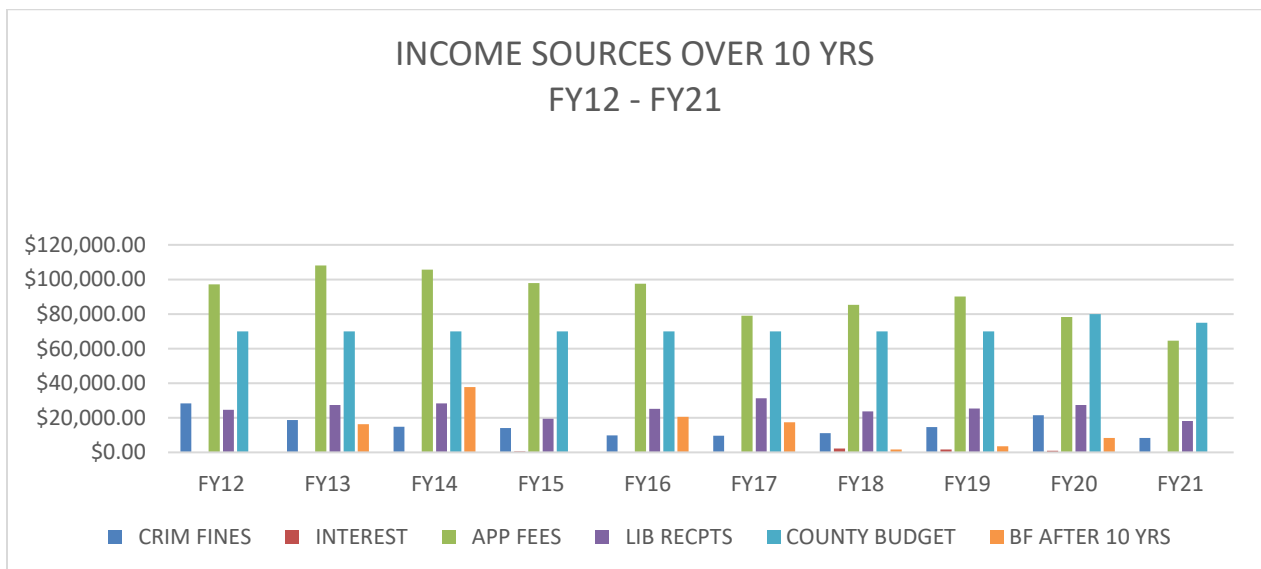
Income

COVID did make its mark on library finances this year. Income decreased by 23%. Appearance fees were 17% lower than last year and 28% lower when compared to FY2019. Last year criminal fines were unusually large, in FY21 they were unusually low with a decrease of 61%. When compared with FY2019, criminal fines are 43% lower. The county appropriation was reduced from \$80,000 to \$75,000 this year. It is still larger than the \$70,000 in FY2019. There was no bond

forfeiture income as there were no bond forfeitures reaching the 10-year mark.



This is the lowest income has been in the last ten years.

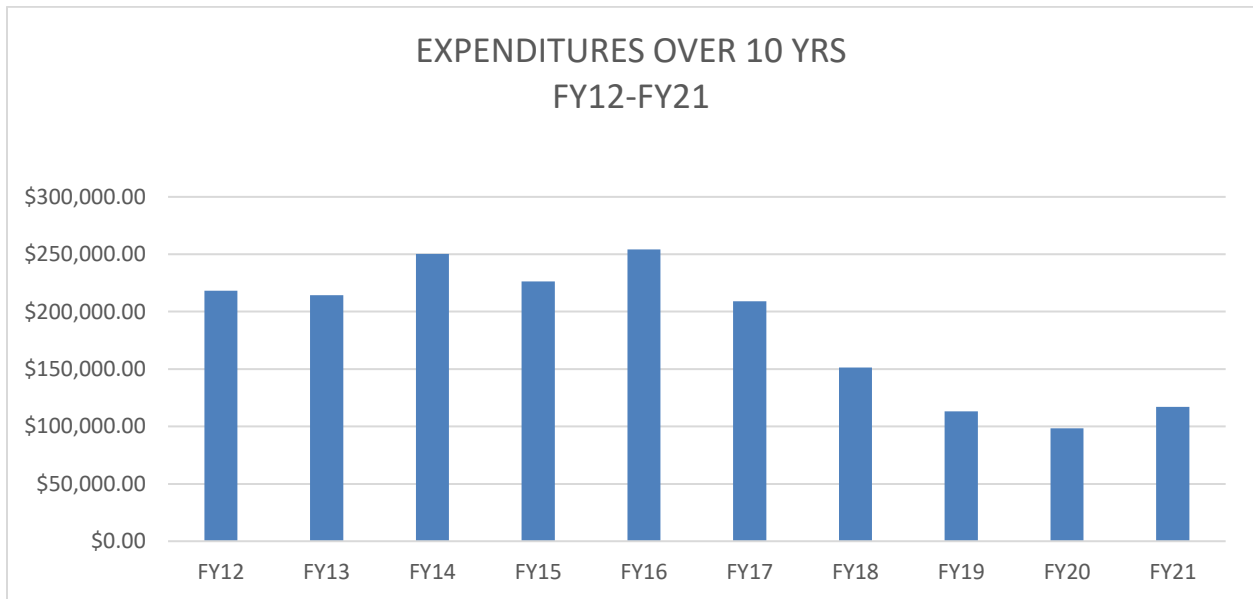


There was a decrease in all income categories.

Expenditures

Law library expenditures increased by 19%. The purchase of many publications was delayed last year while there was limited court access.

Those publications were updated this year. Expenditures were still much lower than in the past.



The law library's spending plan now relies more on digital resources. This allows for a robust collection with lower costs.

Strategic Plan: Status Report

The law library developed a strategic plan to make the best use of resources and to provide the highest quality of service to all who use the law library. The plan with goals and actions taken over the last year follows. Actions may address more than one goal as indicated by the numbers following each action.

GOALS

1. Provide access to justice

“The Maryland Judiciary ensures equal access to justice. The courts develop services and programs that facilitate access to and understanding of court processes.” To meet this GOAL, the Anne Arundel Public Law Library will:

- Provide cost-effective and equal access to legal information resources in multiple formats.
- Identify and respond to information needs of the judiciary and attorneys.
- Identify and respond to areas where self-represented litigants request assistance to legal information.
- Remove barriers that may prevent access to legal information and services.
- Ensure that people who come to our courts without a lawyer know that legal resources are available to them through the law library.
- Strengthen public awareness and understanding of the Judiciary through library resources and programs.
- Expand self-help programs and resources.
- Continue outreach through partnerships for such programs as Anne Arundel County Homeless Resource Day.

2. Be responsive and adaptable to changing community needs

“The Maryland Judiciary provides responsive leadership, ensures a respectful forum for justice, and proactively addresses the changing needs of its constituents

and employees. With the aim of helping families and our communities and, in particular, our most vulnerable citizens, children and seniors.” The AACPLL will:

- Retain a sufficient amount of print-based legal information to meet the needs of those with limited computer skills who access the courts.
- Wisely experiment with newer technologies, such as e-books, “discovery” tools (online catalog) and expanded databases.
- Provide access to resources to assist the non-attorney and self-represented litigant.
- Promote and use language access resources.

3. Communicate effectively with stakeholders

“The Maryland Judiciary communicates effectively to inform and educate the public, the bar, justice partners and staff.” The law library will:

- Provide legal research training to Judiciary staff, as needed.
- Provide programs for courthouse staff on legal resources available to the public.
- Provide training to the Anne Arundel County Public Law Library staff on legal research, reference, and referrals.
- Create and develop talks, open to the public and courthouse staff, on topics relating to “Everyday Law.”
- Provide information about library resources and referrals to local government departments and elected officials.
- Continue to partner with the local bar association, legal service providers and public libraries to provide “Lawyer in the Library” programs.
- Keep current and distribute law library information brochures.
- Create, update and distribute local legal referral information.
- Continue to work with the Anne Arundel County Local Pro Bono Committee to promote pro bono service by Anne Arundel attorneys.
- Promote library resources of interest to the court and bar through the use of varied communication methods.
- Create and maintain online information sources for the general public.

4. Improve systems and processes

“The Maryland Judiciary is forward-thinking and focused on continuous improvements to systems and processes, helping the courts to better serve the people and provide for prompt, efficient and just resolution of cases.” To achieve this GOAL, the law library will:

- Maintain Mutual Aid Agreements with other Maryland Law Libraries as part of the Court’s Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP).
- Provide access to computers and programs needed for document creation and e-filing.
- Review and revise law library procedures as needed to meet the information needs of users.
- Coordinate with court IT so that technology needed to provide the services needed by all is available.

5. Be accountable

“The Maryland Judiciary holds itself to the highest standards of excellence and administers justice with diligence and integrity.” The action plan to reach this GOAL includes:

- Adhering to CMCLLD standards for library operation and resources.
- Providing reports to court administration on library operations.

6. Assure the highest level of service

Because a dedicated and professional workforce is essential to providing quality service to all, the Maryland Judiciary trains, develops and supports a professional and skilled workforce. Our action plans include:

- Providing the training needed for professional development of court library staff.
- Participating in continuing education.
- Participating in professional library and legal services organizations.
- Providing access to the information to meet the needs of all user communities.

7. Build partnerships

The Maryland Judiciary works collaboratively with its justice partners and the public to fulfill its mission. This action plan includes:

- Collaborating with the Anne Arundel Bar Association to promote pro bono in Anne Arundel County.
- Supporting the work of other court departments to ensure they have the information needed for the work of the department and those they serve.
- Collaborating with the Conference of Maryland Court Law Library Directors in matters relating to the operation, management and leadership of the court libraries.
- Coordinating with the Judiciary's Access to Justice Department to enhance library programs and resources.
- Participating in the work of the Judicial Council Community Access and Community Relations Committee to provide the perspective of court law libraries.
- Communicating with the Maryland Access to Justice Commission to ensure awareness of law library programs and resources.
- Working with the Anne Arundel County Public Library to expand law library services and programs.
- Developing and continuing partnerships with Maryland legal service providers to provide services to those of low and middle income.
- Collaborating with Maryland Center for Legal Assistance (MCLA) to coordinate legal information resources needed to support the Family Law Help Center.
- Participating in the work of the American Association of Law Libraries and its Special Interest Sections; the Self Represented Litigation Network Law Librarians Working; the Law Library Association of Maryland; and the Maryland Library Association.

8. Use resources wisely

The Maryland Judiciary uses public funds wisely to assure sufficient resources for personnel, facilities, programs, equipment and technology, all with the aim of efficiently administering justice and providing exceptional public service. This action plan includes:

- Providing transparent budgeting processes.
- Leveraging additional assistance through the use of library interns and volunteers.
- Sharing resources through inter-library loan and document delivery.
- Assessing resources for relevancy to the needs of all user groups.
- Working with vendors to maximize library material/resource dollars.

ACTIONS

- The law library provides online family law forms packets to support the work of the Family Law Help Center. The packets include links to online forms as listed in results of the mdcourts.gov forms finder as well as links to online articles and listings of books in the law library. [1](#), [2](#), [6](#), [7](#)
- The law library continues to offer the Lawyer in the Library Program remotely in partnership with the Anne Arundel County Public Library. The program is held every Wednesday from 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. and on the third Wednesday from 4:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. [1](#), [2](#), [6](#), [7](#)
- The law library worked with the Anne Arundel Local Pro Bono Committee to secure grants for an upgrade to the Calendly scheduling APP to improve Lawyer in the Library scheduling with automatic email and text responses. [1](#), [4](#), [7](#), [8](#)
- The law library added a Virtual Reference Desk to better serve library users remotely. [1](#), [2](#), [6](#)
- The law library created the online nomination form and compiled results for the AABA President’s Pro Bono Award, a project of the Anne Arundel County Local Pro Bono Committee. The award was presented virtually. [1](#), [7](#)
- Joan Bellistri joined CMCLLD members in conjunction with the Maryland Access to Justice Commission to virtually present “Law on the Frontlines: Resources for Public Library Reference,” at the Maryland Library

Association/Delaware Library Association Conference in October 2020 and the Montgomery County Public Library Series for Fall 2020. ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [7](#))

- The law library continued its digital transformation, transitioning most of the general U.S. and federal collection to online only and removed duplicate print titles in anticipation of the move to a smaller space. ([2](#), [6](#), [8](#))
- A JIS networked computer was retained in the new library space for access to MDEC and Thurgood Marshall State Law Library resources. ([2](#), [4](#), [8](#))
- Law library participated in the court's new law clerk orientation by providing information on resources available via its SharePoint site during a social distanced library tour. ([3](#), [6](#))
- Continued to maintain and distribute the Pro Bono Services Directory and the law library brochure to the court information desk and online. ([3](#), [6](#))
- Law library maintained legal information [FAQ pages](#) on the [AACPLL Self Help and Pro Bono Wiki](#) and published [Law Library News](#) via the blog. ([3](#), [6](#))
- Catalog records of cancelled print titles were converted to e-resource records or deleted to reflect the post-move collection. ([1](#), [2](#), [5](#), [6](#), [8](#))
- Financial reports provided quarterly to court administration. ([5](#))
- The law library devised a reopening plan to ensure safety of staff and users while providing library services during COVID. ([5](#))
- The law library submitted a plan for a future library space to court administration: Space and Design Requirements 2021. ([5](#))
- Library provided ongoing training for new and established library staff. An online legal reference course was developed using Microsoft Forms. ([6](#))
- Joan Bellistri as a member of the Partners for Justice program planning committee coordinated and moderated programs for the virtual conference. ([6](#), [7](#))

- Joan Bellistri maintained membership, attended conferences and presented at varied professional organizations as detailed above. Organizations include American Association of Law Libraries, the Law Library Association of Maryland, the Maryland Library Association, and the Self Represented Litigation Network. ([6](#))
- Joan Bellistri was Chair of the American Association of Law Libraries Government Law Libraries Special Interest Section. ([6](#))
- Pro bono hours incurred by Lawyer in the Library volunteers are compiled sent to the lawyers in time for their annual reporting. ([7](#))
- Joan Bellistri is a member of the Judicial Council Court Access and Community Relations Committee SRL Sub-committee. She is also the public member of the Court of Appeals Standing Committee on Pro Bono. ([7](#))
- Joan Bellistri participated in the work of the Attorney General's Access to Justice Task Force Public Awareness Committee. ([7](#))
- As members of the Law Librarians Working Group of the Self Represented Litigation Network, Joan Bellistri and Sara Galligan of the Ramsey County Law Library in St. Paul, MN published a report on the 2019 Survey: "Evaluating Library Services to Self-Represented Litigants: A Story of Two Surveys - SRLN Report 2021 No. 1 (March 2021)." ([7](#))

Goals / Conclusion

The law library continued to provide quality service to all library users throughout this year of COVID by adapting to a new reality of library service with innovation. However, COVID has shown that many were either unable or chose not to visit the library during this time but did not take advantage of available remote service delivery methods.

The law library seeks to improve remote service to all library users by exploring new delivery methods.

The law library should increase awareness of its services so that those in need can get the information and referrals needed. Increased outreach using traditional methods and social media should be explored and implemented.

The law library will update and revise the strategic plan to guide the law library in the coming years to make the best use of resources and to provide the highest quality of service to all who use the law library.