

Resources for Self-Represented Litigants in the Maryland Courts

Fiscal Year 2021

Executive Summary



ACCESS TO JUSTICE
CONFERENCE OF MARYLAND COURT LAW LIBRARY DIRECTORS
JUVENILE AND FAMILY SERVICES
THURGOOD MARSHALL STATE LAW LIBRARY



Resources for Self-Represented Litigants in the Maryland Courts — Fiscal Year 2021



LEGAL INFORMATION

33 new videos added to the **Judiciary's Video Library**.

121,200 views

68% of **People's Law Library** users access the site via mobile phone.

44% of articles are available in Spanish.

10 new **Guide & File** interviews launched.

70% of reference activity at Maryland court law libraries occurred via email.

13,575 hits on the **District Court Form Finder**, and **22,500** on the **Family Law Form Finder**.

LEGAL ADVICE

147,331 instances of service

Remote services increased by 23% over last year.

- 40% of remote services were for family law matters.
- 25,000 instances of service in landlord and tenant matters.

TOP 4 HELP CENTER USER ZIP CODES:

- Glen Burnie
- Pasadena
- Owings Mills
- Baltimore City's Park Heights Neighborhood

LEGAL REPRESENTATION

197 tenants served through the Tenant Volunteer Lawyer of the Day Project.

84% reported that they lived in their home for 1 year or more.

Consumer Protection Project lawyers represented **523** consumers.

Judicare provided more than **13,500** hours of legal services.

74% was through litigation.

Resources for Self-Represented Litigants in the Maryland Courts — Fiscal Year 2021

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Recognizing that access to high-quality, free legal help is vital to ensuring equal access to justice, the Maryland Judiciary offers many programs and services to help address the needs of litigants who use the courts without counsel. Help is available in many formats and through various channels. Over the past 30 years, programs have evolved to better meet the diverse needs of members of the public who use these services. The following is an executive summary of the report *Resources for Self-Represented Litigants in the Maryland Courts – Fiscal Year 2021*.

Legal Information


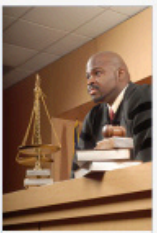



Legal information is available in a variety of formats.

The Judiciary’s **Maryland Court Help Video Library** covers court basics and law topics that are relevant to self-represented litigants. Litigants can view online videos that are packaged with tip sheets to make complex information easy to understand. Videos run between two and ten minutes in length and are closed-captioned in English and Spanish. In fiscal year 2021, there were more than 121,200 video views, nearly three times more than in fiscal year 2020.

Court Help Videos

My Laws, My Courts, My Maryland: A video library for the self-represented

Have a legal problem and don't know where to begin? These videos may help. Each video includes transcripts in English and Spanish, a tip sheet, and links to resources, forms, and court services. [Watch this 30-second preview to see how the Court Help Video Library works.](#)

<h4>Law Topics</h4> <p>What is service of process? Expungement? Rent Escrow? Each video in this series tackles a specific legal subject.</p>  <p>Learn More >></p>	<h4>Court Basics</h4> <p>From filing fees to court interpreters, videos in this series deliver fundamentals on how the court operates.</p>  <p>Learn More >></p>	<h4>Family</h4> <p>Videos on family matters, including Child Custody, Child Welfare, and Divorce.</p>  <p>Learn More >></p>	<h4>Guardianship</h4> <p>Considering becoming a guardian? Have you been appointed? This video series has the information you need for success.</p>  <p>Learn More >></p>	<h4>Get Started</h4> <p>Should you represent yourself? Or should you get a lawyer? These videos help get you on track to self-representation.</p>  <p>Learn More >></p>
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Online **form finder pages** pose plain language questions to help litigants find and select the correct court form.

Maryland’s network of **court law libraries** provides access to legal information, forms, educational programs, and the Maryland Electronic Courts (MDEC) case management system. Professional law librarians provide help with civil and criminal legal questions and help fill in gaps where limited resources exist. Law library services are available in person, by phone, and online. The public accounted for 77% of law library assistance in fiscal year 2021.

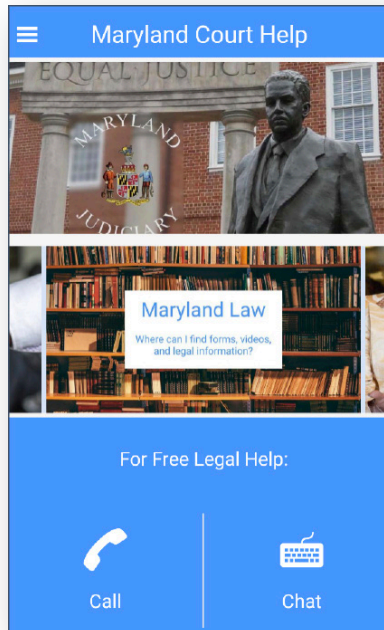
Live, interactive **webinars** are offered monthly on many different topics, including rent court for landlords and tenants, and family law topics such as divorce and child custody. Classes are taught by Maryland Court Help Center attorneys. The most popular topics are *Filing for Divorce in Maryland* and *Child Custody*.



The **People’s Law Library** is a legal information and self-help website maintained by the Thurgood Marshall State Law Library. In fiscal year 2021, the number of total users and pageviews increased. The number of users increased by 23%, and pageviews grew by 27% to 3.9 million. There are more than 600 English language resources, of which 44% are available in Spanish. The site’s top 20 pages and all domestic violence articles are also available in French, Korean, and Chinese (Mandarin/Simplified).



The **Maryland Court Help App** brings all of these resources together in one place. This free resource helps users find a court, identify resources, and explore legal help options.



Maryland Guide & File is a free document assembly product that uses a series of interactive guided interviews to help litigants fill out court forms. The program asks questions and uses answers to complete court forms. Information is recorded on court forms exactly as it is entered. Topics include child custody, divorce, small claims, and fee waiver requests.

Plaintiff Information
A plaintiff is the person or business that starts a court case.

Are you filing as a person or a business? *

Person Business

Plaintiff's Full Name:

First * Middle Last * Suffix

[Select] v

Address

Street Address *

City * State * Zip Code *

MD

Phone Number * Fax Number

410-555-1234 410-555-1234

Please include dashes. Please include dashes.

Email Address

Additional Resources - Self-Help

- [Court Help Centers](#). Talk to a lawyer for free: in-person, on the phone or by live chat.
- [Legal Help](#). Instructions and information on different legal topics.
- [People's Law Library](#). Maryland's legal information website.
- [Legal Services Directory](#). Find a free or low-cost lawyer in Maryland.
- [Self-Help Videos](#). Videos on a wide range of Maryland legal topics.
- [Maryland Court Help App](#). Legal help from your phone or tablet.

? Where do I go for help?

What is a Plaintiff?

A plaintiff is the person or business that starts a court case.

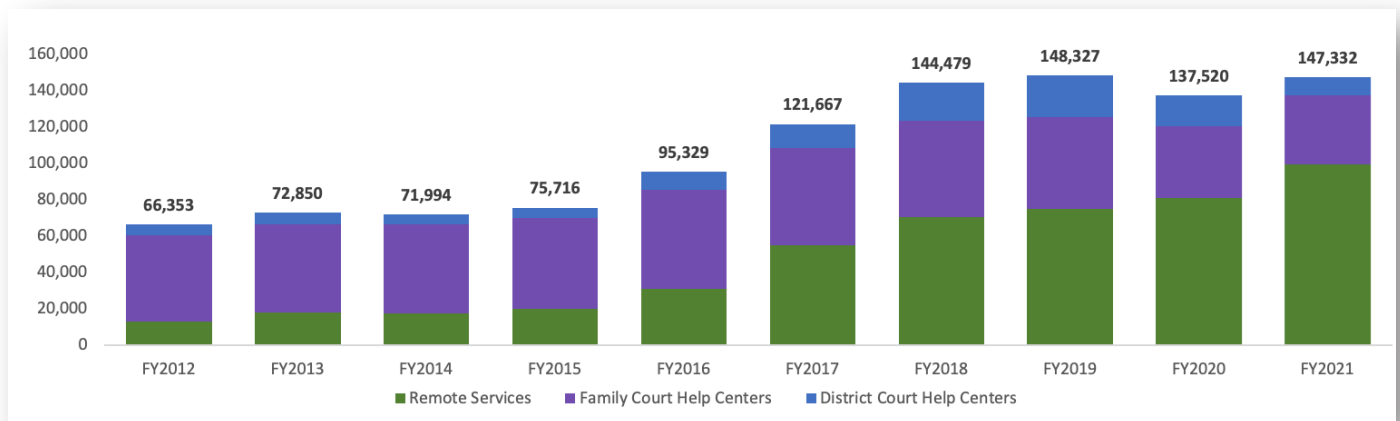
? What is...?

CourtTV delivers curated playlists of legal videos to courthouses throughout Maryland. Large screen monitors are located in public waiting areas, law libraries, and court help centers statewide. Promotional content helps increase awareness of court-based services for the self-represented.

Legal Advice

The Judiciary’s statewide network of **Maryland Court Help Centers** provides free legal advice and information to self-represented litigants with civil legal problems. Services are available to all individuals, regardless of income, and can be accessed in person and remotely by phone, live chat, video conferencing, and email.

In fiscal year 2021, Maryland Court Help Centers provided more than 147,000 instances of service statewide. Sixty-seven percent of services were provided remotely. Demand for remote services increased by more than 23% in fiscal year 2021.

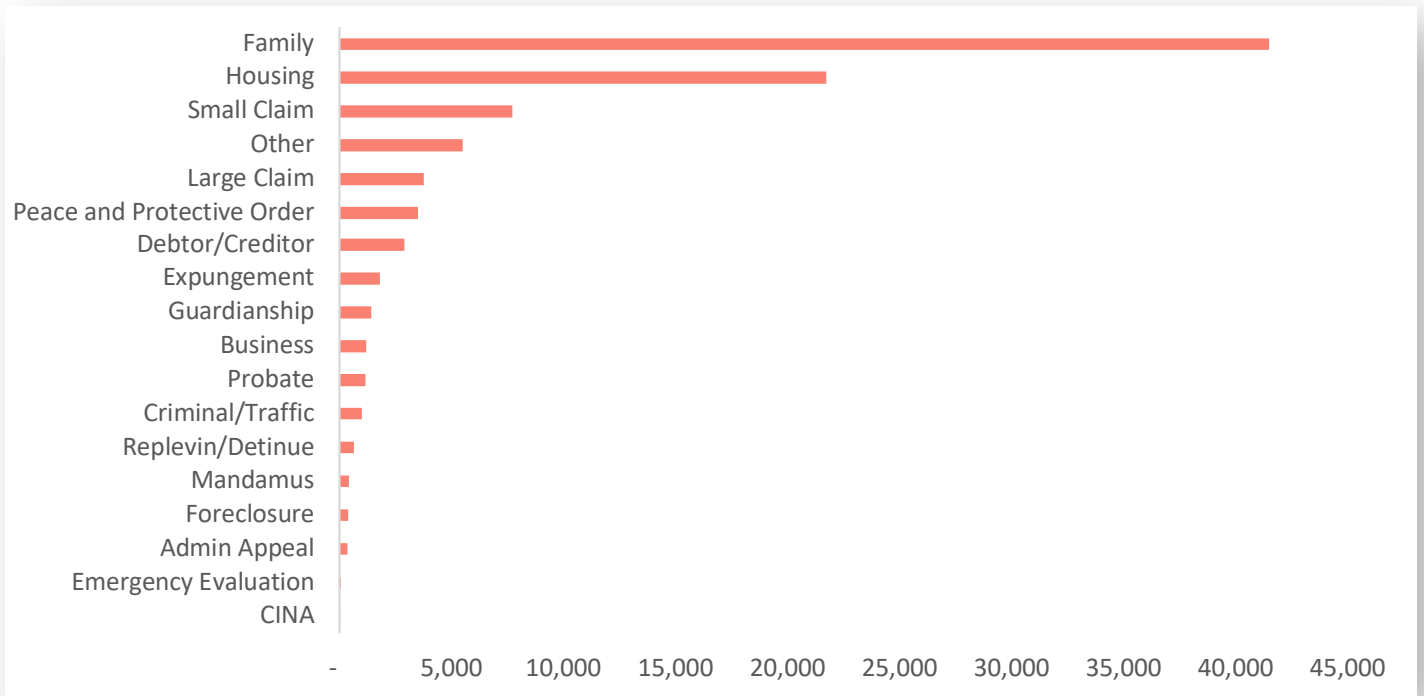


Instances of Service – All Maryland Court Help Centers

Maryland Court Help Center attorneys provide legal advice, help litigants complete forms, understand court documents, and make many referrals to legal services providers and the private bar.



The greatest demand was for help with family law matters, followed by housing matters, which include failure to pay rent cases.



Remote Services - Case Types - Fiscal Year 2021

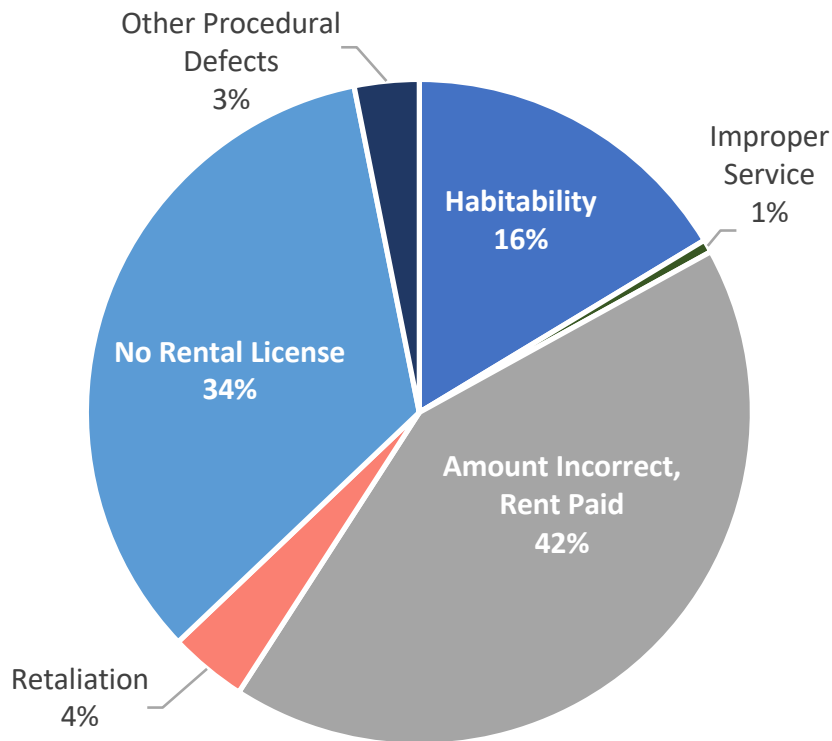
Maryland Court Help Center attorneys fielded many questions about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on custody and visitation orders.



Legal Representation

The Judiciary funds programs operated by nonprofit legal service organizations which provide representation to litigants in a variety of high-stakes civil matters.

The **Tenant Volunteer Lawyer of the Day Program (TVLD)**, operated by the Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland (PBRC), represented 197 tenants in Failure to Pay Rent Cases on 80 days in the District Court for Baltimore City. Eighty-four percent of tenants reported that they lived in their home for one year or more, and 23% reported that they had lived in their home for more than four years. The program indirectly benefitted 199 children who were living in homes that were at risk of eviction.



TVLD - Legal Issue Identified - Fiscal Year 2021

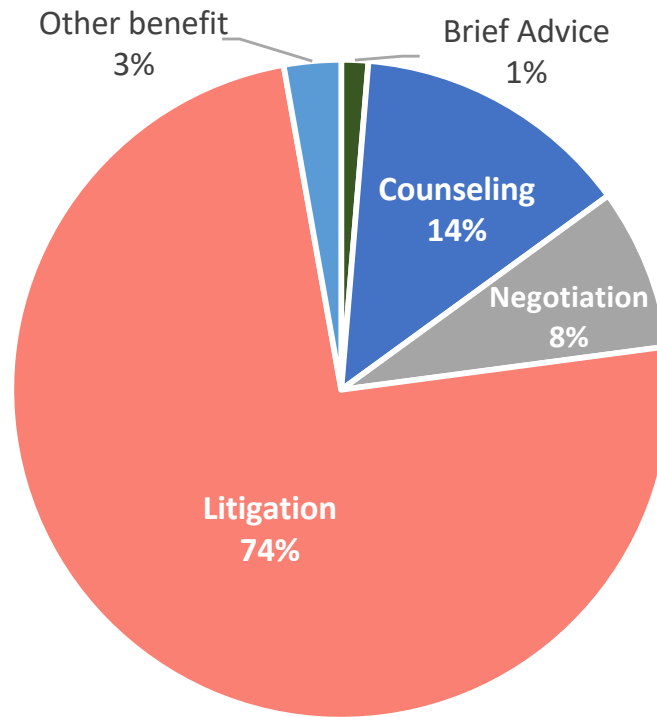


The **Consumer Protection Project (CPP)**, operated by PBRC and the Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service (MVLS), represented 523 consumers in fiscal year 2021. Sixty percent of consumers assisted reported an annual household income of \$29,999 or less.

The Judiciary funds **Judicare** via a grant to the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC). Grantee organizations recruit, train, and support experienced family practitioners from the private bar who provide full representation to litigants involved in contested custody and other family law matters.

In fiscal year 2021, 155 attorneys provided more than 13,500 hours of legal services to litigants who could not afford counsel. The program opened 642 new cases and closed 607 cases. Of the closed cases, 74% received representation through litigation.

Judicare beneficiaries received \$1,239,972 in financial benefits alone, including child support, alimony, and marital property awards.



Judicare - Level of Service - Fiscal Year 2021



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