



Reference Highlights

Library reference statistics are reviewed annually to examine details of the interactions between reference staff and patrons. The resulting information may be used to modify reference response procedures, desk staffing schedules, and other elements of Library reference provision.

The Reference Summary examines direct interactions between reference staff and patrons, as when a patron contacts the Library with a question related to legal information, resources, or research (“information interaction”). The Summary does not touch upon other channels of contact such as website or database use, circulation and physical collection usage, or education and outreach programs offered by the Library. Nor does the Summary include information about Library visitors who do not interact with staff. These may include Judiciary staff or local attorneys who occupy research carrels and use Library resources but do not consult with staff for research assistance, or public patrons who access the Library’s public computers independently. The Summary should not, therefore, be considered a full picture of all Library staff activity and workflow. Information on overall Library activity during the fiscal year is available in the Library’s *Annual Highlights*.

FY2023 Note on Statistics Collection

In FY2022, the Library implemented a new reference management system (RMS) to streamline workload and process. The new RMS collects statistical information in a different manner than previous methodology. In prior fiscal years, statistics were collected using a combination of methods including use of a basic online recording system. Each interaction between reference staff and patron had to be recorded manually, with staff entering the required categories one by one. The process required a certain estimation of information as well as a heavy time burden for staff. The new RMS allows for both a speedier and more detailed level of statistical collection. The presentation of data in terms of number of interactions contrasts significantly from previous years. FY2023 is the first full fiscal year with the new RMS, so some statistical reporting will differ. Percentages will be used rather than actual number counts until there are more years available for comparison.

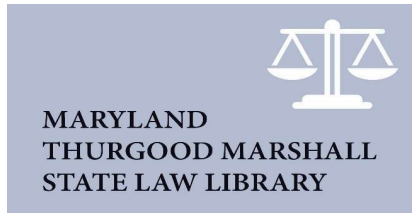
Services

The Library provides reference and research assistance to Maryland Judiciary judges and staff, attorneys, librarians (public, corporate, and special), government agencies, students, and members of the public, including self-represented litigants, correctional facility residents, and others in search of legal information for many purposes. Patrons are mainly either Maryland residents or have questions about Maryland law.

Reference staff interact with patrons through in-person visits, telephone, email, and standard mail. Interactions with patrons range from brief directional questions (“Where can I find the Maryland

Reference Summary and Statistics Analysis

Fiscal Year 2023 (July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023)

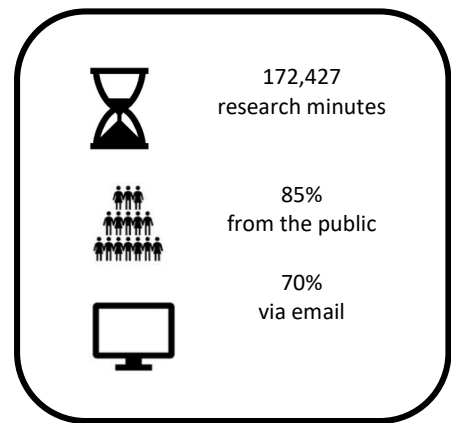


Code?”) to lengthy research queries (“What are the laws on mandatory reporting of child abuse?”). Staff assist through provision of informational materials, instructional assistance, and evaluation of resources.

Reference staff adhere to Library guidelines for reference provision, including the [Guidelines for Legal Information Service to the Public](#) and the [Guidelines for E-Mail Reference Services](#) adopted by the State Law Library Committee.

Statistical Snapshot

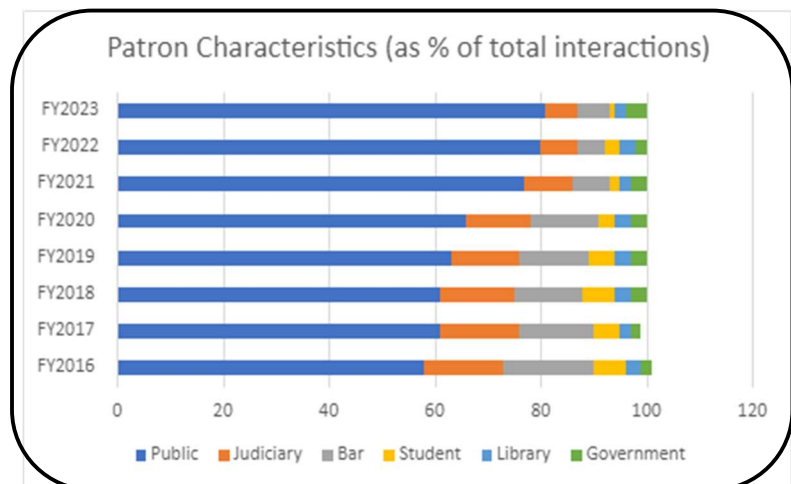
Patron interaction statistics are collected using categories recommended by the Conference of Maryland Court Law Library Directors (CMCLLD). These categories include: type of request, topic of request, patron profiles, duration of research, how contact was made, and method of response.



Patron Characteristics

Patron information (non-personally-identifying) is tracked for all inquiries. Patrons include the Maryland Judiciary (judges, law clerks, staff), the Bar (attorneys, paralegals, and law firm staff), government agencies, and the public (self-represented litigants or SRLs, students, incarcerated persons, historians, genealogists, general legal researchers, and staff from public libraries). Library patrons are not required to identify themselves. When staff cannot identify the patron category, Public is used as the default. The Library takes particular note of the percentage of inquiries from public patrons because they often lack legal backgrounds. Consequently, Library staff exert additional time and effort to explain concepts and processes. Thus, from a service perspective, high and increasing percentages of public patrons generate a proportional increase in reference staff workload.

The Library endeavors to facilitate seamless access to information sources. Library materials are increasingly available remotely through the Library’s digital initiatives, including direct digitization, content linking, and content development on both the Maryland People’s Law Library (PLL) and the Library’s website. Making these resources available and accessible to patrons requires extensive Library staff time and involvement, even though these



efforts remain invisible to the end user. Through these digital initiatives (particularly the PLL content development) public patrons are often able to meet their information needs without an in-person visit. When visiting, the Library’s public computers and wifi network enable patrons to connect to databases throughout the facility, often with minimal staff interaction.

The Library puts equally strong emphasis on meeting our Judiciary patrons’ needs through invisible and seamless connections. Many of the Library’s fee-based access points (databases) are accessible to court staff statewide via the Judiciary’s network. Connection to these resources means that Judiciary staff are able to address simpler requests with fewer in-person library staff interactions. However, when information needs are more complex, the interactions are frequently multiple and detailed.

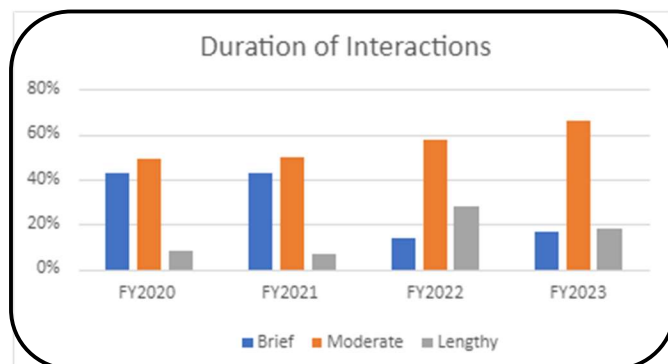
Reference and Research Questions

Patron questions range from quick inquiries (“ready reference”) to requests for lengthy research assistance and cover a wide range of law-related topics. Examples of patron queries include:

- Landlord-Tenant (late rent, rent increases, back rent, landlord duty to repair)
- Family (filing for divorce, modifying a divorce decree, modifying child support or visitation)
- Employment (discrimination, benefits, pension systems, independent contractor issues)
- Wills & Estates (power of attorney, intestacy)
- Real Property (deeds, ownership disputes, neighbor disputes)
- Civil Actions (responding to a complaint, judgment collection, expungement)

Question Duration

To aid in understanding reference staff workload, the Library tracks the duration of interactions (how long for staff to complete an interaction). Per CMCLLD guidelines, the Library tracks statistics for Brief (<5 minutes), Moderate (6-30 minutes) and Lengthy (>30 minutes). As illustrated in the accompanying chart, there has been a steady increase in moderate-length questions. These queries have risen from 49% in FY2020 to 66% in FY2023. Along with this has been a considerable drop in brief questions, from 43% in FY2020 down to 17% in FY2023. This corresponds to a reduced number of in-person interactions,



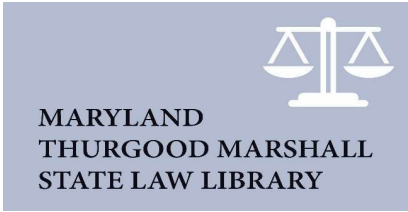
a volume that has not fully rebounded since the COVID shutdown. This reduction also mirrors a continuing increase in email traffic via the “Ask a Law Librarian” portal on the PLL homepage.

Lengthy interactions are mainly comprised of assistance to Judiciary patrons with legislative, regulatory, and Rules histories. As an illustration, staff may be asked to assist in identifying the development of a particular

current section of the *Maryland Code*. Staff will explain to the patron how statutory language develops and that most prior language must be sought in the superseded print volumes of the *Maryland Code*. Staff will then lead the patron through the steps in the print volumes to collect amendments. Once

Reference Summary and Statistics Analysis

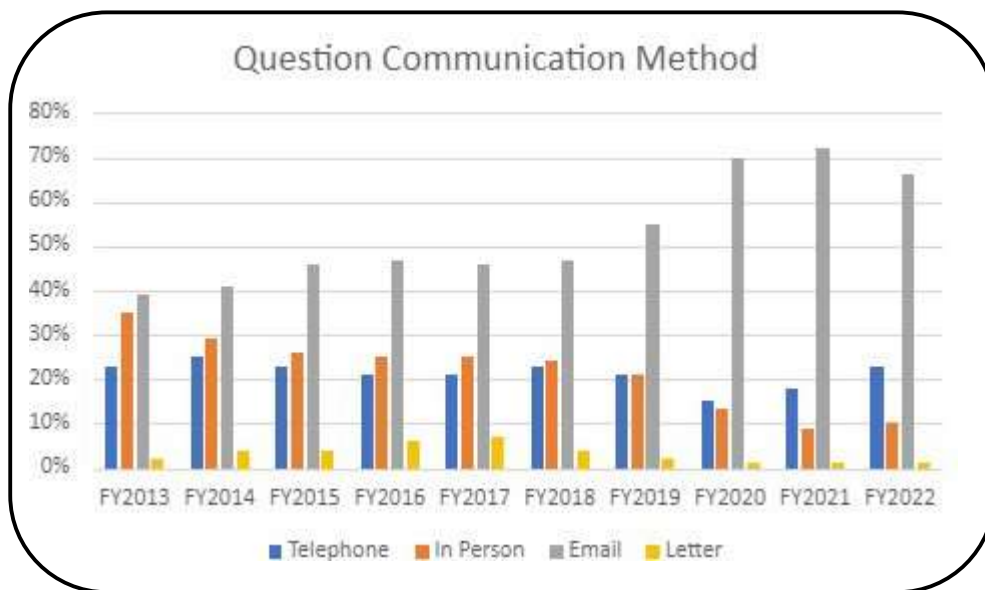
Fiscal Year 2023 (July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023)



critical amendments have been identified, staff will describe the resources for locating discussion of the development of those amendments, identify helpful reports and bill files, and help connect the patron to those resources. Depending on the complexity of the history needed, such assistance can take anywhere from an hour to several days to complete.

Patron Communication Methods

Patrons access reference services through in-person visits, telephone, email, and standard mail. Telephone and in-person assistance has continued to constitute a smaller percentage of overall reference activity, with email communication overtaking by large margins.



**Operation restrictions were present in FY2020 and FY2021. For specifics on restrictions, see the Library's Scanned Collections, Maryland Judiciary Administrative Orders, under Administration – Closing of Courts.*

Summary

The Library continued to see a rise in reference usage, building on growth over the past decade. As the Library moves forward with use of the reference management system, the ability to collect detailed information will allow for a more informed analysis of reference work. As reference volume continues to increase with no expectation of slackening, the informed analysis will help streamline workflow for continued superior library services.