

The purpose of the Reference Statistics Report is to review the interaction of library reference staff and library patrons. This report addresses only the interactions of reference staff and patrons. It does not include statistical totals, summaries or analysis of other interactions between patrons and the Library, such as website visits, database searches, external trainings given by staff, or visitors to the Library who do not interact with patrons. The numbers included in this report do not, therefore, give a complete picture of Library activity and assistance level, only the level of activity at the reference desk.

Reference Services Summary

The Library provides reference and research assistance to members and staff of the Maryland Judiciary, attorneys, librarians, government agencies, students, and members of the general public, including self-represented litigants (SRLs) and correctional facility residents.

Reference services are provided through in-person visits, telephone, email, regular mail, and chat. Through March 2017, the Library provided chat services both live and through the chat follow-up service, similar to an email system. From April 2017 forward, the Library provides chat assistance only through the follow-up service.

Patron inquiries range from brief directional questions to lengthy research queries. Staff provides assistance through provision of informational materials, instructional assistance, and evaluation of resources.

Reference staff adhere to Library guidelines for reference provision, including:

Guidelines for Legal Information Service to the Public www.lawlib.state.md.us/services/guidelines-public.html , and the *Guidelines for E-Mail Reference Service*, www.lawlib.state.md.us/aboutus/policies/EmailReferenceGuidelinesMSLL.pdf .

Statistical Summary

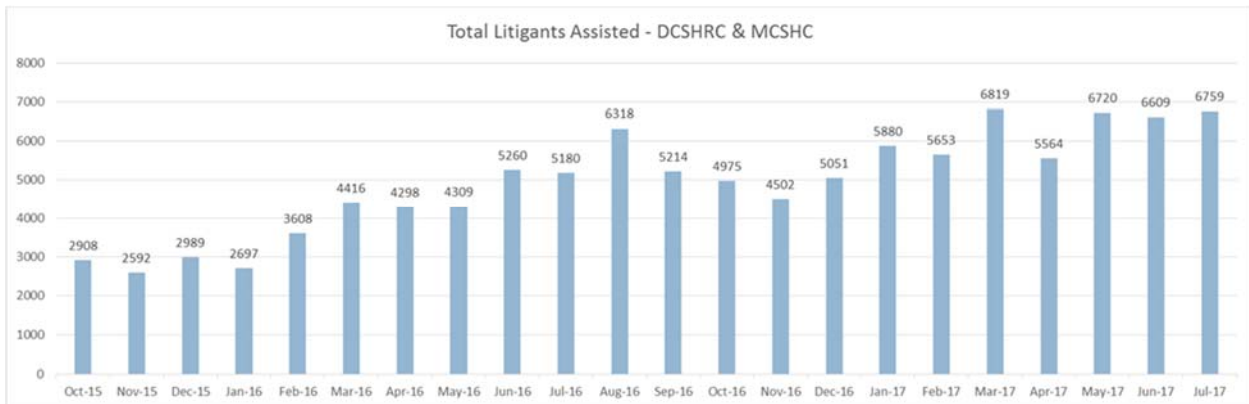
The Library tracks statistics using a combination of methods. The Library bases tracked categories on those recommended by the Conference of Maryland Court Law Library Directors. The way the patron contacts Library reference staff dictates the details recorded about that interaction.

- In-person, telephone, and letter inquiries are recorded on the Gimlet system (gimlet.com). Staff record the format, location, patron category, question type, and duration of each interaction.
- Email inquiries are recorded using the email system. Monthly totals and duration are recorded.
- Chat follow-up interactions are tracked through QuestionPoint, the system used by Maryland AskUsNow! Monthly totals and duration are recorded.

Library staff handled a total of 8966 information interactions during FY2017, a decrease of 10.8% from FY2016. The decrease is attributed to several factors, including the expansion of the Maryland Courts Self-Help Center and cessation of live chat services. It is noted in this report that while number of questions has declined, the length of time the questions demand of staff has increased (see *Question Duration*, below).

Fiscal Year	Total Requests	% Change
FY2017	8966	-10.8%
FY2016	10051	2.0%
FY2015	9818	-9.2%
FY2014	10567	11.9%
FY2013	9440	3.7%
FY2012	9099	3.1%
FY2011	8827	4.2%
FY2010	8471	---

The Maryland Judiciary expanded free self-help services on October 30, 2015, when the newly-named Maryland Courts Self-Help Center (SHC) began providing phone and online assistance with extended hours for a wide array of civil matters in the Circuit and District Courts (see press release, <http://mdcourts.gov/media/news/2015/pr20151030.html>). The first eighteen months of the SHC saw an overall rise of 160% in usage. There has been a strong marketing effort connected to the SHC, including prominent placement of the logo and link to the webpage. It is fair to deduce that public traffic that might otherwise have found its way to the Library has instead directed itself to the SHC.



Figures provided by the Maryland Access to Justice Department

A small decrease may be attributable to a change in the Library's Maryland AskUsNow activity. The Library continues to provide assistance via the AskUsNow follow-up service. However, staff ceased providing live chat in March 2017. With the removal of the live chat link from a number of locations, questions formerly streamed directly to the Library now are going to alternate resources. The impact of this action has not yet fully been realized, as the cease took place three months before the end of the year. It is worth noting, nonetheless, that the question-per-month chat service average before ceasing live sessions was 21; since moving to follow-up only, the monthly average is 9. The impact on the annual total is not statistically significant, but may be more so for FY2018.

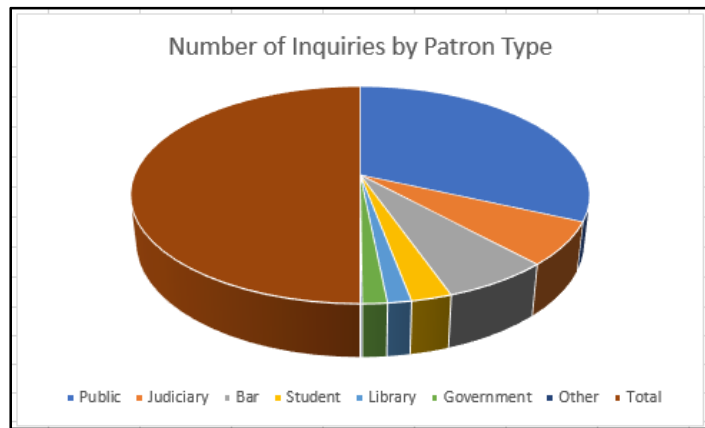
Patron Characteristics

The Library’s patrons include members of the Maryland Judiciary (judges, law clerks, staff), the Bar (private and pro bono attorneys, law firm staff and paralegals), and the public (self-represented litigants, students, historians, genealogists and general legal researchers). Patron type information is gathered for in-person, telephone, and letter inquiries using Gimlet. Neither email nor chat sessions are identified currently by patron type.

In FY2017, 4377 interactions were recorded on Gimlet. Of the total 8966 interactions, this constitutes 49%, or half the total numbers. Therefore, a look at the breakdown of library patron types summed from the system reflects a usable picture of the percentage of interactions from each category.

Patron categories FY2017

Patron Category	% of Total
Public	63.70%
Judiciary	12.80%
Bar	12.90%
Student	4.80%
Library	2.80%
Government	2.90%
Other	0.20%
Total	100%



Services to the public have grown steadily since the Library began tracking patron categories in FY2013, rising from just under 50% five years ago to over 63% in FY2017.

Patron Categories Fiscal Year Comparison

Patron Category	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017
Public	49%	57%	61%	60.5%	63.7%
Judiciary	19%	15%	15%	14.7%	12.8%
Bar	19%	17%	14%	13.3%	12.9%
Student	9%	6%	5%	5.8%	4.8%
Library	2%	3%	2%	2.9%	2.8%
Government	n/a	2%	2%	2.6%	2.9%
Other	2%	1%	<1%	0.3%	0.2%

Reference and Research Questions

A look at certain facets of questions received by the Library provides helpful insight into the patron population. Collected statistics help identify staff time and volume needed to handle inquiries, and the particular type of assistance needed from Library staff in addressing the inquiries.

Question Type

The majority of reference interactions fall unsurprisingly into Reference and Reference-related categories, with all other categories considerably lower in numbers. The rise in the Reference & Research numbers are offset by a decrease in Circulation & Payment numbers. This may be attributable to the efforts by library staff to encourage patrons to email or scan and download to flash drives their research materials. Both scanning and downloading to flash drives can be done free of charge in the Library.

Question Type Breakdowns

Question Type	FY17 %	FY16 %	FY15 %
Reference & Research	71.4%	69%	68%
Directional	9.3%	10.5%	8%
Referral	3.9%	4.3%	3%
Technology Assistance	7.8%	7.4%	8%
Circulation & Payment	7.6%	8.7%	13%

Question Duration

Tracking the duration of questions helps to understand the staff time and effort needed to address reference desk interactions. A longer duration interaction generally reflects:

- The level of complication of the question; for instance, a legislative intent question generally will take at least 15 minutes, and often will take significantly longer;
- The level of need or challenge that the patron presents; for instance, patrons with a low level of understanding of the legal system, terminology and research methods, or technology require more attention and time from staff.

In the four years in which question duration has been tracked, the number of brief (<5 minutes) questions has dropped significantly, with a corresponding rise in longer interactions.

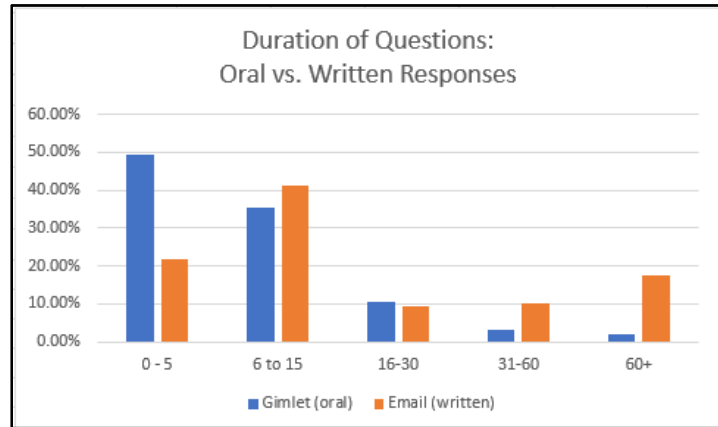
Duration of Questions Recorded on Gimlet

Minutes	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017
0 - 5	62.2%	60%	54.2%	49.4%
6 to 15	25.8%	27.3%	29.7%	35.4%
16-30	9.3%	8.8%	10.5%	10.7%
31-60	1.4%	2.5%	3.6%	3.3%
60+	1.2%	1.4%	2%	1.2%

The requirement for a written response means email requests, like letter responses, take longer on average than their oral (phone and in-person) counterparts. Email reference requests are not recorded on Gimlet. They have been represented in past reports in annual totals, with no specific duration attached to their numbers. In FY2017, the Library began tracking duration of email questions.

Duration of Questions, Gimlet vs. Email

Minutes	Gimlet (oral)	Email (written)
0 - 5	49.4%	21.8%
6 to 15	35.4%	41.3%
16-30	10.7%	9.3%
31-60	3.3%	10.2%
60+	1.2%	17.4%
Total	100%	100%



For the combined numbers from in-person, telephone, and letter inquiries, brief interactions occupy almost half (50%) of activity. Only 1.9% of the questions required more than an hour of staff time for research and response. For email interactions, just over one-fifth (20%) of activity falls into the very brief category; and almost an equivalent one-fifth (17%) occupied more than an hour of staff time.

Noting that the overall number of reference inquiries dropped from FY2016, the growth in the number of lengthier interactions recorded on Gimlet is of significance. Email duration numbers will be monitored from FY2017 forward for corresponding trends.

Spotlight: Services to Correctional Facility Residents

The number of letters received from correctional residents continued to rise in FY2017, from an average of 9 per month to almost 11 per month, or an overall 20% rise since FY2016; annually, the number constitutes a 200% rise from FY2004. (*Note: The FY2016 Report incorrectly states the increase from FY2004 to FY2016 as 239%; it should be 139%.*)

Number of letters received from correctional residents by fiscal year

FY04	FY05	FY06	FY07	FY08	FY09	FY10	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17
43	51	44	37	34	57	58	72	84	86	86	78	103	129

Noting, as shown, that each letter requires more staff time to structure a response, a rise of 20% from the prior year is a significant increase.

In FY2016, staff began to record reference requests received by letter in the Gimlet system, accounting for time spent on each piece of correspondence. The *FY2016 Reference Report* describes the information obtained through this change. In FY2017, comparisons between letter and non-letter requests result in the same conclusion, letter requests take more time per request. Fifty percent (50%) of non-letter requests take under 5 minutes to complete, whereas only 16.7% of letter requests are similarly brief. Fewer than 1% of non-letter requests occupy more than an hour of staff time, contrasted with the almost 17% of letter requests with a similar time dedication.

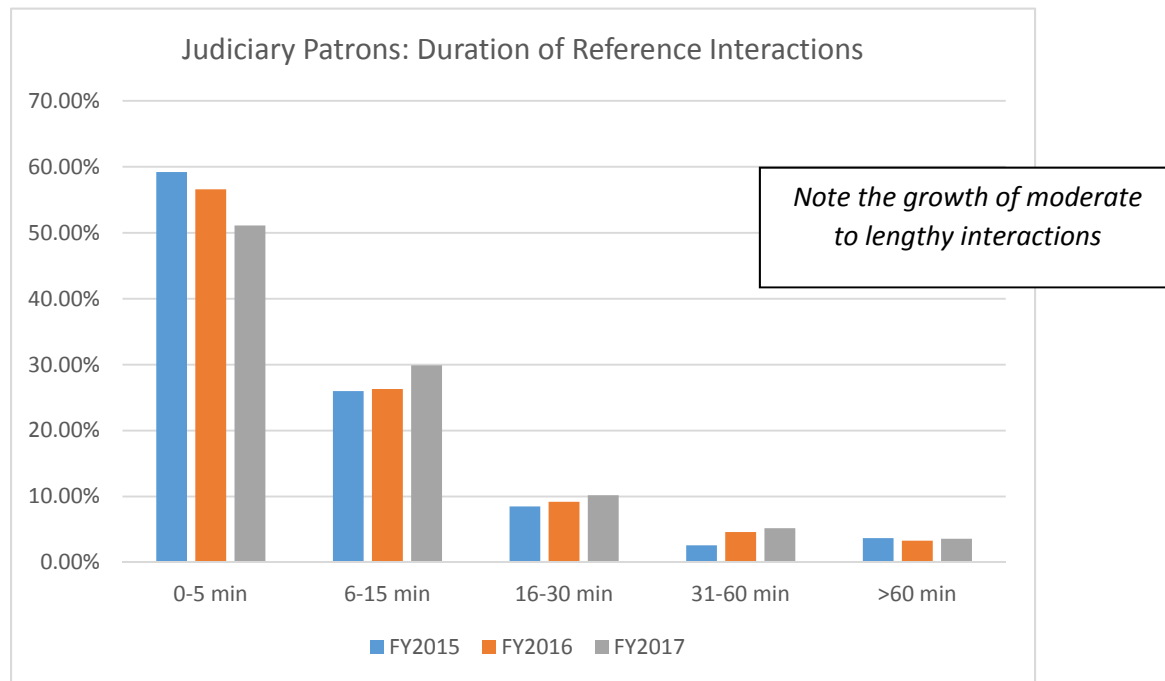
Duration (minutes)	% of Letter Total	% Non-Letter Total
0-5	16.70%	50%
6-15 min	34.50%	35.40%
16-30	15.50%	10.60%
31-60	16.70%	3.10%
60+	16.70%	0.89%

Spotlight: Service to the Judiciary

Note above that the percentage of overall direct reference services to Judiciary patrons has declined since FY2013, from 19% down to 12.8%. Rather than seeing this decline as a reduction in Judiciary usage of the library overall, it should be noted that members of the Judiciary, including judges, law clerks and other staff, have access to the Library’s online information tools, such as databases and digital materials through both CourtNet and the main Library website. There is less need for Judiciary staff to contact Library staff directly to locate information. Rather, the Library staff’s accomplishments in the areas of digital collection and management, website augmentation and management, and information dissemination (training and education) are making it easier for Judiciary staff to connect with the Library and its services without contacting a reference librarian. Thus, a look at the reference desk numbers does not give a full picture of the interactions between the Library and the Judiciary.

Additionally, while the total number of times someone from the Judiciary contacts library reference staff directly may be declining, the length of those interactions is growing longer overall – they are able to handle their quick questions through the Library’s online information materials, but longer ones come to Library staff.

Judiciary	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017
0-5 min	59.20%	56.60%	51.10%
6-15 min	26.00%	26.30%	29.90%
16-30 min	8.50%	9.20%	10.20%
31-60 min	2.60%	4.60%	5.20%
>60 min	3.70%	3.30%	3.60%



Spotlight: Staff Assistance with Technology

Patron ability in using databases, the internet, and word processing systems ranges widely. As more information materials and access points move to technology-based resources, library staff are called upon to assist with use of such technology, from basic assistance to advanced research. To aid in understanding the volume of time spent that is directly related to technology, two Gimlet categories are used:

A. *Reference-Online/Computer*, indicates questions for which library staff assistance and instruction was required in accessing library materials through electronic formats.

Examples of such questions include:

- How to locate forms on Westlaw
- How to search for cases on Google Scholar
- How to search law journal articles on HeinOnline
- How to search across multiple resources on Lexis
- How to access court documents on the MDEC system
- How to find notes of decisions for a case on Westlaw

Requests for technology assistance

Fiscal Year	% of Total Interactions
FY2013	7.0%
FY2014	9.4%
FY2015	11.8%
FY2016	10.5%
FY2017	11.0%

B. *Other-Tech Assistance*, indicates questions for which library staff assistance and instruction were required in utilizing technology. Examples of such questions include:

- How to email cases from Westlaw or Lexis
- How to convert a PDF document to a Word document
- How to do a word count in a document
- Questions about formatting in Word

Since FY2013, assistance by Library staff with technology-based questions has grown by 150%. As courts and the larger government move more information and access points into an online environment, the need for a human who can act as a connector between the public and the electronic resources becomes more critical. Therefore, this area bears watching.

Reference by Weekday

Days of the week

The Library is open six days of the week: on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, from 8am to 4:30pm (8.5 hours); on Tuesday and Thursday from 8am to 9pm (13 hours); and on Saturday from 9am to 4pm (7 hours). Because the Library is open late on Tuesdays and Thursdays, the total number of reference interactions is expected to be higher on those days.

Reference Interactions by Weekday

Weekday	FY2017	FY2016	FY2015	FY2014
Monday	14.8%	15.1%	15.5%	16%
Tuesday	22.8%	22.9%	23.9%	21.4%
Wednesday	16.6%	14.5%	16.5%	16.7%
Thursday	23.3%	24.6%	23.1%	21.5%
Friday	15.9%	16.4%	14%	16.1%
Saturday	6.6%	6.6%	6.9%	8.3%

The apportionment of questions across the weekdays has been steady across the last several years. As in past years, the average number of questions on Saturdays is about half of that received on weekdays. Saturdays are staffed by a single librarian, rather than the two-person staffing standard on weekdays. Therefore, the question level per staff member is steady across all six days. There has been no significant shift in numbers over the three years recorded.

Patron Communication

Patrons can contact the Library reference desk using six different communication methods: in-person, telephone, email, chat, regular mail (letters), and via the interlibrary loan system.

Note1: The Library participated in live chat through March 2017; since then, the Library handles chat requests via follow-up only.

Note2: Requests through the OCLC Interlibrary Loan system were calculated beginning in FY2016.

Percentages for each area are holding generally steady from the last few fiscal years. Looking over the seven year span through which format has been tracked, requests received via email (including chat sessions, which come to the library via an email system) have risen significantly, from 30% in FY2011 to almost 50% of the total received. The rise in email and letter numbers, when taken in the context of time required to respond, represents a more significant consumption of staff time than in prior years (see *Duration of Questions* above).

Questions by Format

Question Format	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17
Telephone	33.0%	27.0%	23.1%	25.1%	23.1%	20.7%	21.2%
In-Person	35.1%	35.2%	34.7%	29.4%	25.8%	25.1%	25.2%
Email	29.9%	34.3%	38.7%	41.2%	45.7%	47.3%	46.2%
Chat	1.0%	2.6%	2.6%	3.5%	4.6%	3.0%	2.4%
Letters	0.8%	0.9%	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%	1.0%	1.4%
Interlibrary Loan	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.9%	3.5%

Conclusion

The figures presented in this report can be summed up by the following:

- The number of interactions with identified public patrons continues to rise, now constituting 63% of the Library's activity.
- Requests received by letter (correctional residents) has increased 200% from FY2004.
- The Library now receives almost half of its requests via email.
- The time needed from library staff per request is increasing.
- Requests requiring technology assistance from library staff continue to increase.