



# Law on the Frontlines: Legal Reference for Public Libraries

*MLA/DLA Annual Conference  
May 2022*

# Introductions



Catherine McGuire  
Deputy Director  
Maryland Thurgood Marshall State Law Library

[lawlibrary@mdcourts.gov](mailto:lawlibrary@mdcourts.gov)  
410-260-1430



Reena Shah  
Executive Director  
Maryland Access to Justice Commission

[reena@msba.org](mailto:reena@msba.org)  
443-703-3037



Joan Bellistri  
Director  
Anne Arundel County Public Law Library

[AALawLibrarian@mdcourts.gov](mailto:AALawLibrarian@mdcourts.gov)  
410-222-1387

# Learning Outcomes



Describe Access to Justice and why it matters to public libraries



Understand and employ “best practices” for conducting a legal reference interaction



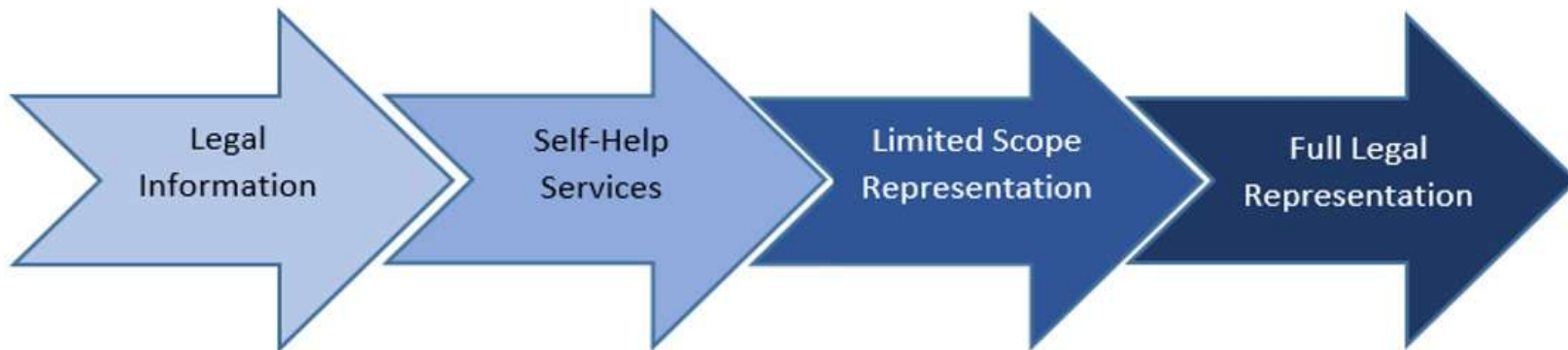
Understand and apply knowledge of law and government structure



Assess referral options and select appropriate options

# What is Access to Justice?

Access to Quality Legal Information = Access to Justice



About you...



What do I need to know about legal reference?

# Interpersonal Dynamics

- Emotions impact the interaction – both patron and provider
- Focus on "can" rather than "cannot"
- Set and respect limits
- Develop and practice scripted language

# Information not Advice

- The difference is...
  - Are you *broadening* or *narrowing*?
  - Who has the power?
- Rephrase – look for the information nugget
- Trust your instincts
- Confirm with a supervisor



## Rely on your strengths

- Help find information
- Demonstrate how to use resources
- Education about the content and structure
- Suggest other sources of information
- Direct to other providers

## Ask for more information

- Where is this happening?
- What are you trying to accomplish?
- What have you looked at so far?  
Who have you talked to?  
Where did you hear about...?
- Are you in court or aiming to be in court? Do you know which one?
- Do you have any paperwork I could see?

# Determine the need

- Information
- Law
- Legal Assistance
- Services
- Forms

# Finding legal information

## State-Specific: Delaware

- [Delaware Courts Help](#) (Topics)
- [LSCD Public Law Library](#)

## State-Specific: Maryland

- [Maryland People's Law Library](#)
- [Maryland Court Help: Law Topics](#)

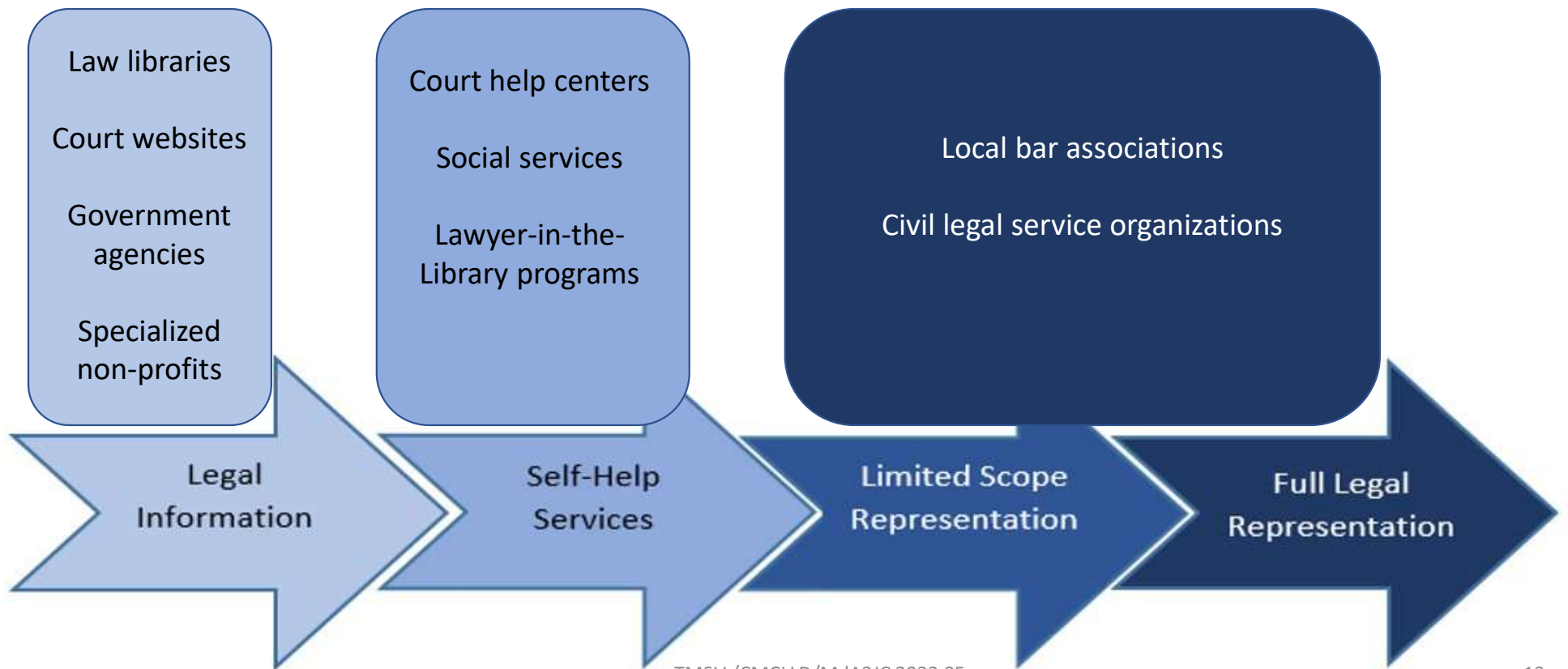
## General

- [Nolo.com](#)
- [Cornell Legal Information Institute](#)

## What can you access already?

- Your library catalog or database collection
- Partner libraries

# Finding referrals



# Finding referrals

## **Maryland**

[Maryland Court Law Libraries](#)

[PLL Legal Services Directory](#)

[PLL Legal Clinic Calendar](#)

[Court Help Centers](#)

## **Delaware**

[Delaware Judicial Law Libraries](#)

[Delaware Legal Assistance](#)

[Delaware Legal Help Link](#)

## **In other states...**

Legal assistance

[LawHelp.org](#)

Law Libraries

[AALL Government Law Libraries SIS Members](#)

[State, Court, and County Law Libraries in the United States](#)

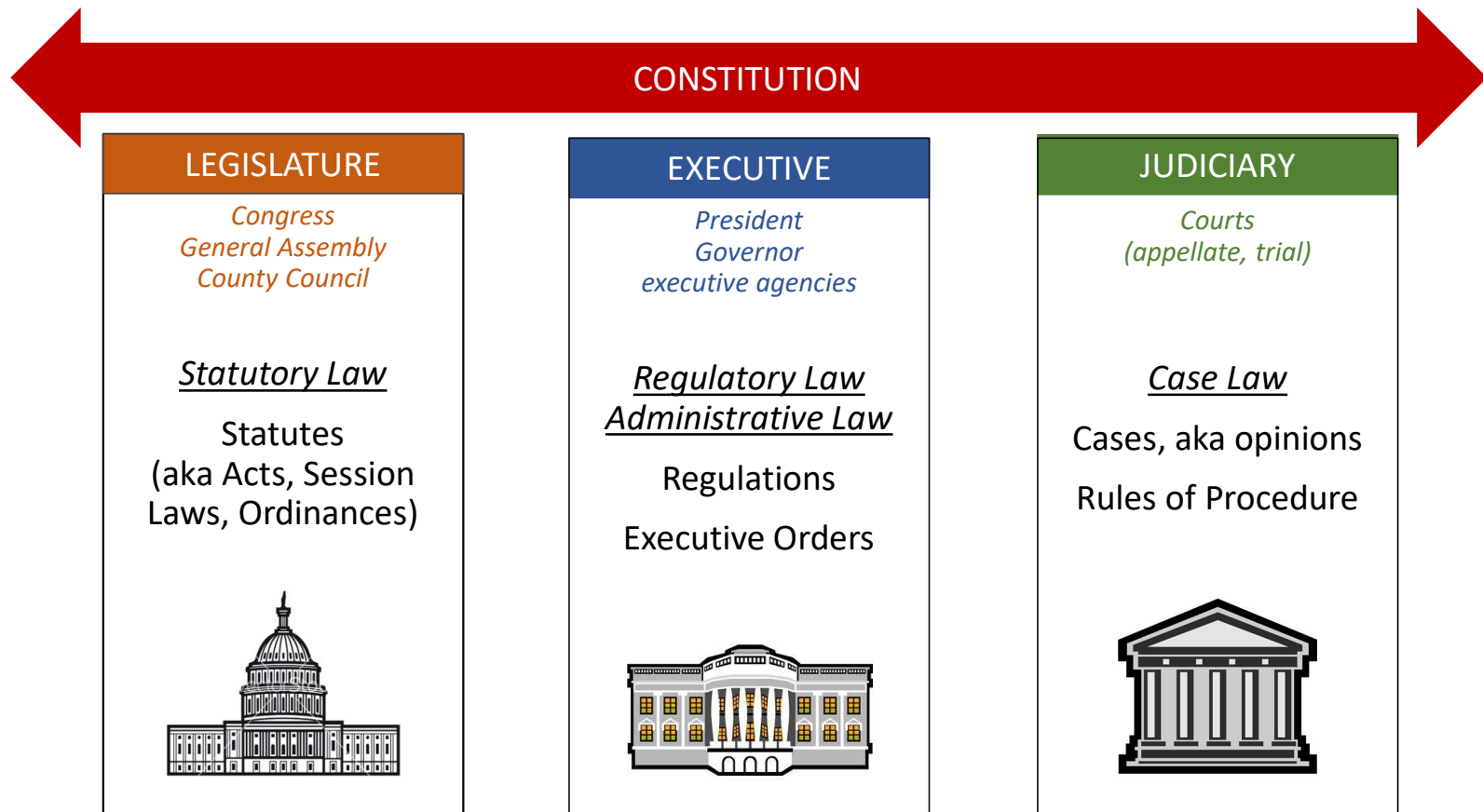


Questions?

What do I need to know about law?

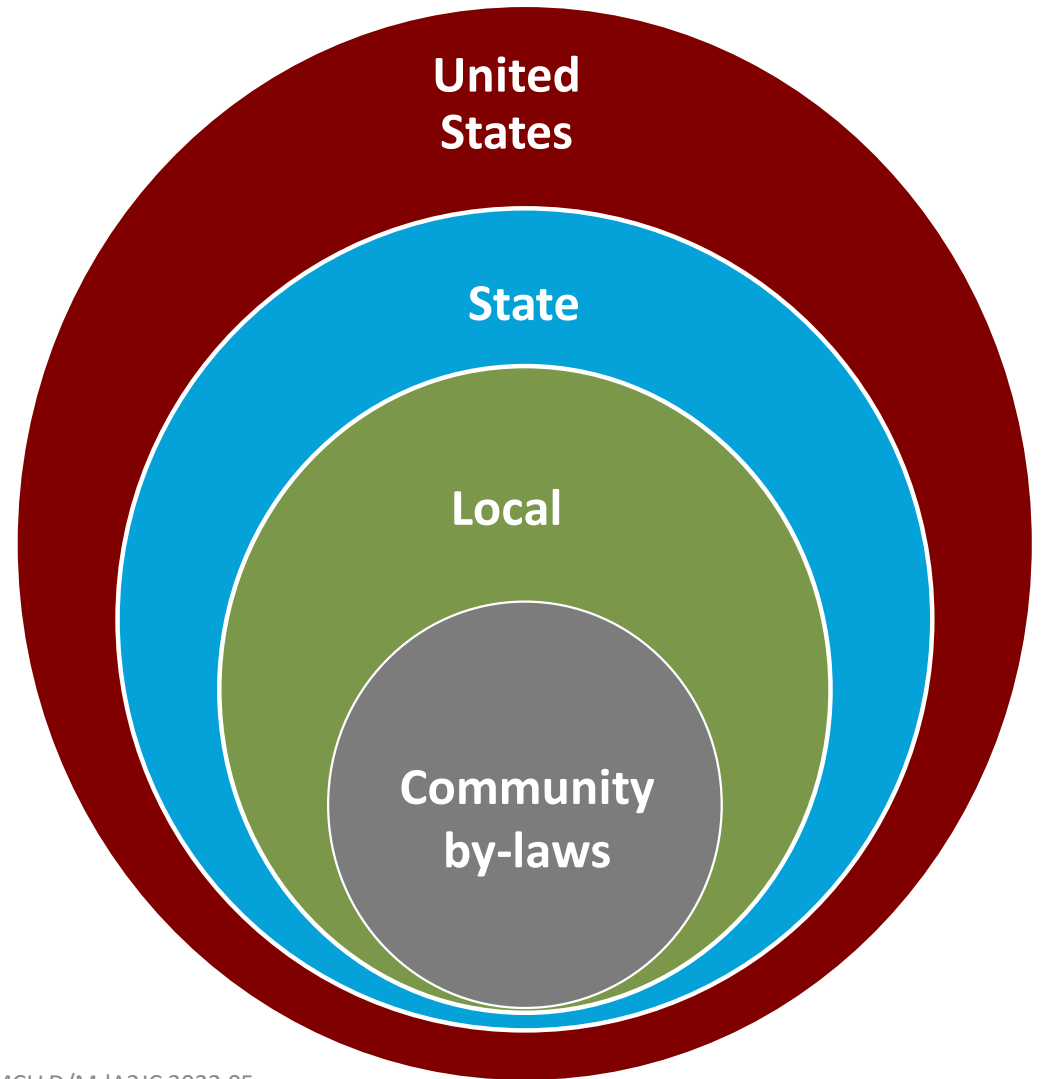


# Government Structure



# Location, Location!

*Where something takes place matters*





Importance of  
Dates  
*Why does it  
matter?*

Language  
of Law  
What does  
it mean?



# Recognizing Citation Formats

General Citation Guide:

[Introduction to Basic Legal Citation](#) (Cornell LII)

Maryland Public Library Toolkit:

[Citing Maryland Law](#)

[Delaware Rules of Legal Citation](#)

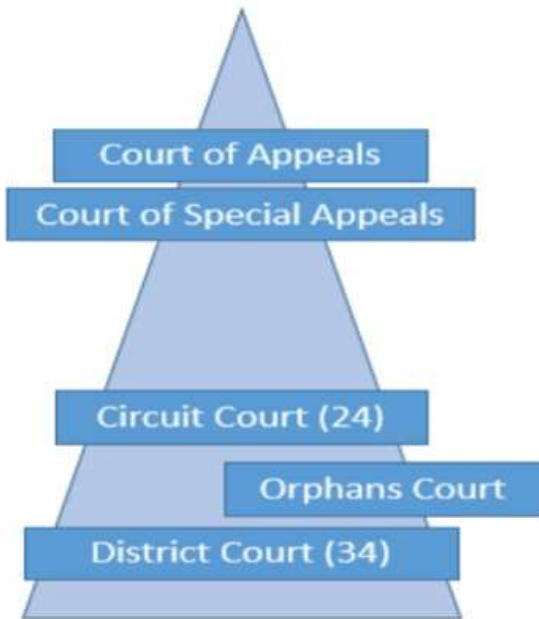
Details are important! See, for example:

Md Code, Family Law §5-104

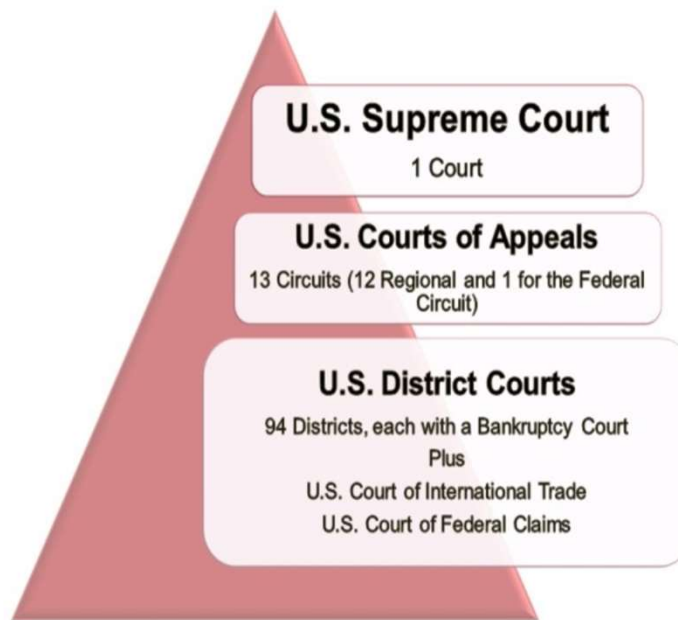
Fam. Ct. Civ. R. 41

Super. Ct. Crim. R. 61

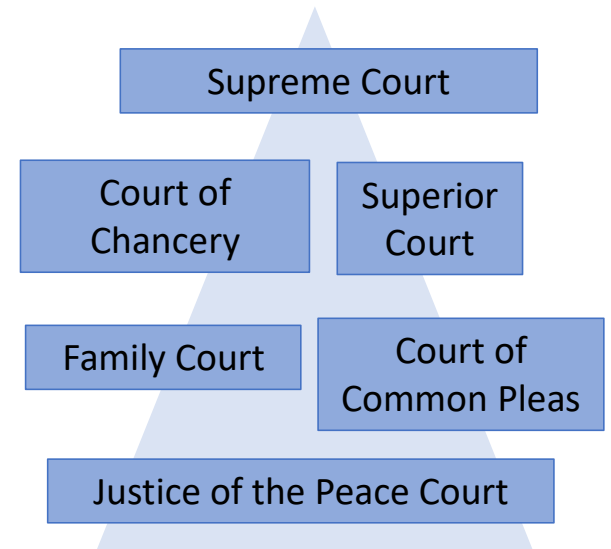
# Court Structure



**Maryland Courts**



**Federal Courts**



**Delaware Courts**





Questions?

# Finding Statutes, Rules, and Regulations

Maryland

[Gateway to Maryland Law](#)

Maryland State Law Library

Delaware

[Delaware Legal Research](#)

Delaware Law School,  
Widener University



# Finding Case Law

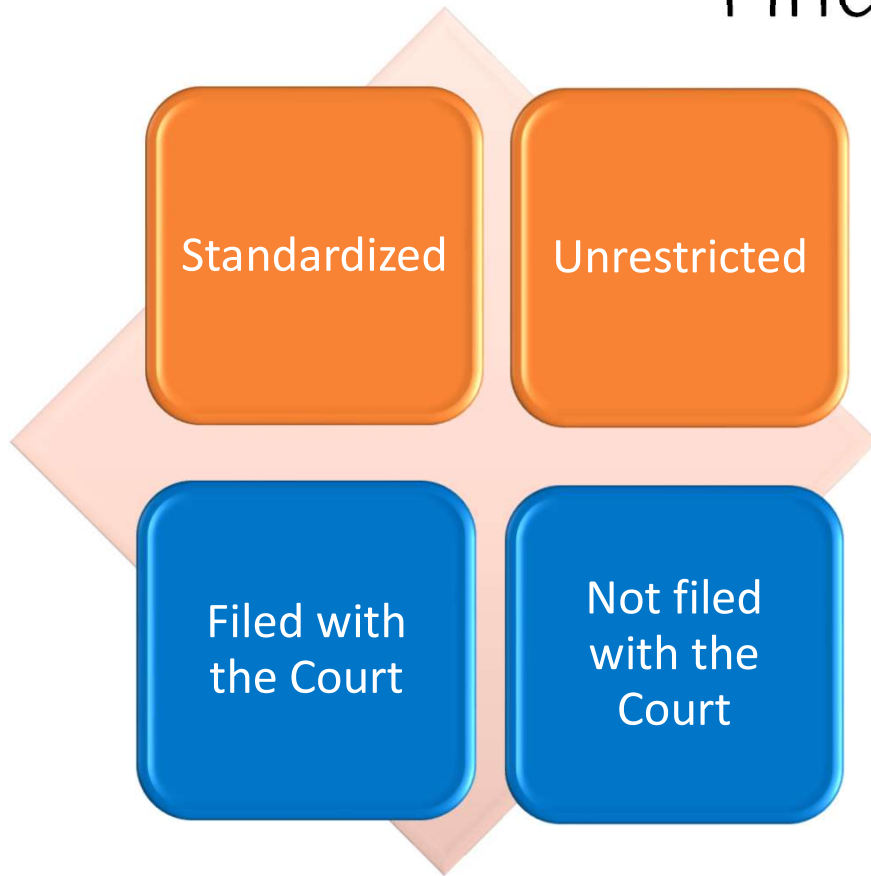
## **Secondary Sources**

Often provide citations to  
primary law

## **Case Law Databases**

Westlaw / Lexis (fee-based)  
Google Scholar (free)

# Finding Forms



- Court forms (court websites)
- Formatting support
- Sample forms books – examples and guidance
- Identifying the right form is often *advice*
- When in doubt – contact a law library

<b>Standardized Forms</b>		<b>Unrestricted Forms</b>	
<b>Filed in Court</b>	<b>Not Filed in Court</b>	<b>Filed in Court</b>	<b>Not Filed in Court</b>
Most District Court Forms	Power of Attorney	Motions	Wills
Most Family Law Forms		Complex Civil Complaints	Leases
Bankruptcy			Contracts

# Finding a Law Library

## Maryland Law Libraries

[mdcourts.gov/ccl](http://mdcourts.gov/ccl)

Thurgood Marshall State Law Library 

### Circuit Court Law Libraries

Allegany County	Charles County	Prince George's County 
Anne Arundel County 	Dorchester County	Queen Anne's County
Baltimore City 	Frederick County	St. Mary's County
Baltimore County 	Garrett County	Somerset County
Calvert County	Harford County	Talbot County
Caroline County	Howard County 	Washington County
Carroll County 	Kent County	Wicomico County
Cecil County	Montgomery County 	Worcester County

## Delaware Judicial Law Libraries

[courts.delaware.gov/lawlibraries/](http://courts.delaware.gov/lawlibraries/)



### Judicial Law Libraries



New Castle  
County Law  
Library



Kent County  
Law Library



Sussex County  
Law Library

# Self-Education

## Basic civics

- Schoolhouse Rock, *Three Ring Circus* (YouTube)
- [Center for Civic Education](#)
- National Constitution Center [video collection](#)
- [USA.gov/branches-of-government](https://www.usa.gov/branches-of-government)

## More about legal reference

- [Maryland Frontlines](#)

## Delaware Law

- [Widener University, Delaware Law School LibGuides](#)
  - [Delaware Legal Research: Getting Started](#)
- [Delaware Courts, Legal Research Tips](#)

## Maryland Law

- [People's Law Library](#)



Questions?