

# Law on the Frontlines

*Legal Reference for Public Libraries*



## Best Practices for Legal Reference

# Introductions

***The Frontlines Workgroup includes representatives from the Thurgood Marshall State Law Library, Maryland Court and County Law Libraries, the Maryland Access to Justice Commission, and the Access to Justice Department of the Administrative Office of the Courts.***

***Instructors for each course will vary but the information provided is based on the core curriculum of the ongoing Frontlines Project.***

***Today's instructors are...***

Catherine McGuire  
Thurgood Marshall  
State Law Library

Joy Hollerbach  
Thurgood Marshall  
State Law Library

# Learning Outcomes

*After this session, you should be able to...*



Describe Access to Justice and why it matters to public libraries



Identify a legal reference question and employ best practices to manage the reference interview



Choose and employ top resources for legal information

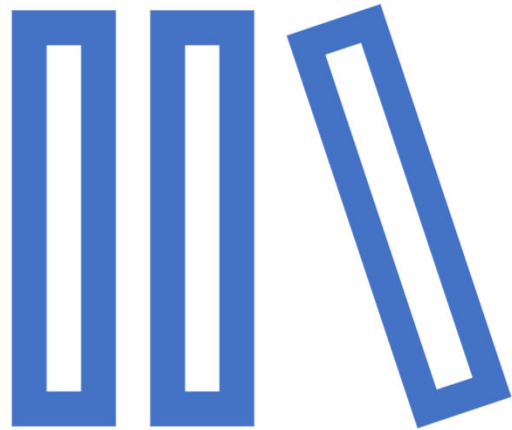


Assess referral choices and select appropriate options

# Self-Assessment

What is your level of comfort with questions about law and legal matters?

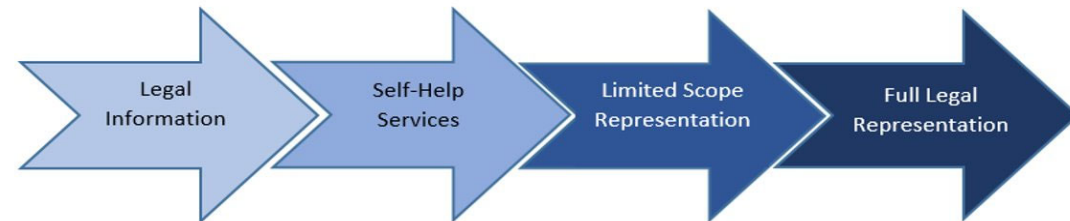
1. I'm just a beginner.
2. I've had a few legal questions. I want to learn more.
3. I feel pretty confident but would like to brush up on my skills.



# What is Access to Justice ?

**Our justice system**

**Legal assistance comes in many forms**



**Public libraries are perfect partners!**

# Your experience

What kind of questions about law does  
your library get?

Share in the chat box!

What do I need to know about legal reference?

How do I  
know the  
question is  
about law?

- Listen to the words they use to describe the situation.
  - *Fair / rights / allowed or permitted*
  - *Is it allowed for my landlord to enter my apartment when I'm not there?*
  - *It's not fair that my ex isn't paying support.*
  - *My mom is disabled and can't drive. Does my brother have a right to use her car?*
- Does the situation include a conflict of some kind, that may need resolution?
- Did the situation arise from a law-related process?
- Honestly, sometimes it's hard to tell – experience is the best teacher.



# Practice

# Interpersonal Dynamics

- Emotions impact the interaction – both patron and provider
- Focus on "can" rather than "cannot" - use positive language
- 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
- Ask a colleague



# Practice

My ex got a new job and I think he's earning more money now. Can I make him pay more child support?”

# Rely on your strengths

- Help find information
- Demonstrate how to use resources
- Educate about the content and structure
- Suggest other sources of assistance
- 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

# What can you access?

Which of the following can you access from your library?  
Choose all that apply.

1. Legal texts in your library's collection, like publications from Nolo or the Maryland State Bar Association.
2. Gale Legal Forms database
3. Westlaw, Lexis, or another legal database
4. Access to the local community college's paralegal or legal studies program resources and library collection.

Do you find helpful resources on the basic internet? What are your favorite internet-based legal information sources? Share them in chat!



Where  
should you  
start?

### RESOURCES FOR YOUR PATRON

- [People's Law Library of Maryland](#)
- [Maryland Court Help](#)
- [Nolo.com](#), Legal Articles
- Cornell Legal Information Institute's [Wex](#)
- Check your library catalog or database collection

### RESOURCES FOR YOURSELF

- [Thurgood Marshall State Law Library Website](#)
  - MD Public Library Toolkit
  - *Law on the Frontlines*

# Practice!

1. How do I add a name to my property deed?
2. My neighbor's tree just dropped a huge branch across our shared fence. Who pays to have the branch removed and fix the fence?
3. I just turned sixteen. I want to get a job delivering newspapers. Do I need a work permit?

Where can I  
send people  
for more?

- Local resources – county law library!
- PLL Legal Services Directory and Clinic Calendar
- Maryland Court Help Centers
- Government agencies

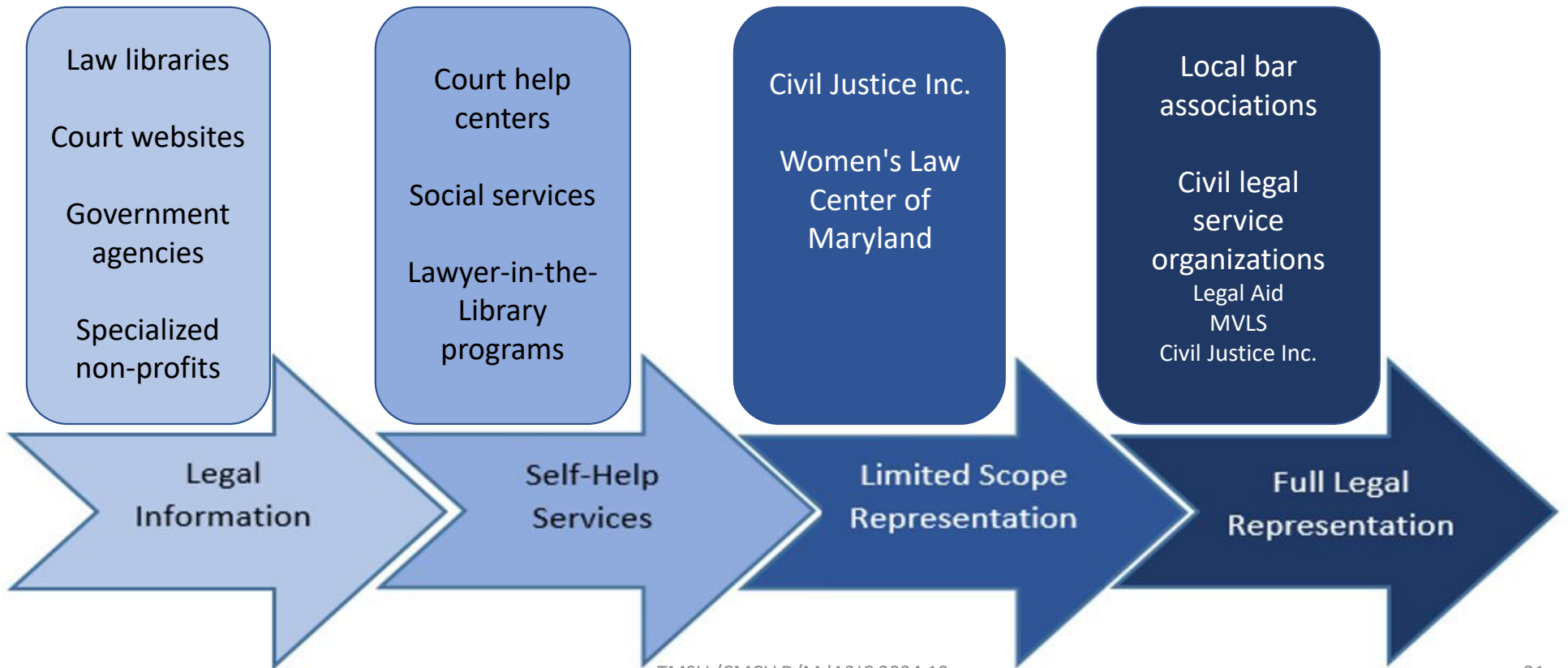
# Local resources

Does your county have a local county law library?

1. Yes
2. No
3. I don't know

If you don't know, type your county into the chat window and we'll tell you!

# Sorting out referrals



Join us for  
more  
Frontlines  
this Fall!



Foundations of Law for Public Library Reference  
November 20, 2024

[Link here](#)

Navigating the Law: Finding Maryland Legal Forms  
December 11, 2024

[Link here](#)





Questions?



# Law on the Frontlines

*A cooperative project advancing access to justice*

[mdcourts.gov/lawlib/using-library/for-librarians/legal-reference-training](https://mdcourts.gov/lawlib/using-library/for-librarians/legal-reference-training)

Thurgood Marshall State Law Library

[www.mdcourts.gov/lawlib](https://www.mdcourts.gov/lawlib)

410-260-1430

[lawlibrary@mdcourts.gov](mailto:lawlibrary@mdcourts.gov)

Maryland Court & County Law Libraries

[www.mdcourts.gov/ccll](https://www.mdcourts.gov/ccll)

Maryland Access to Justice Commission

[www.mdaccesstojustice.org](https://www.mdaccesstojustice.org)

Access to Justice Department,  
Administrative Office of the Courts

[www.mdcourts.gov/accesstojustice](https://www.mdcourts.gov/accesstojustice)

*Thank you for joining us today!*