



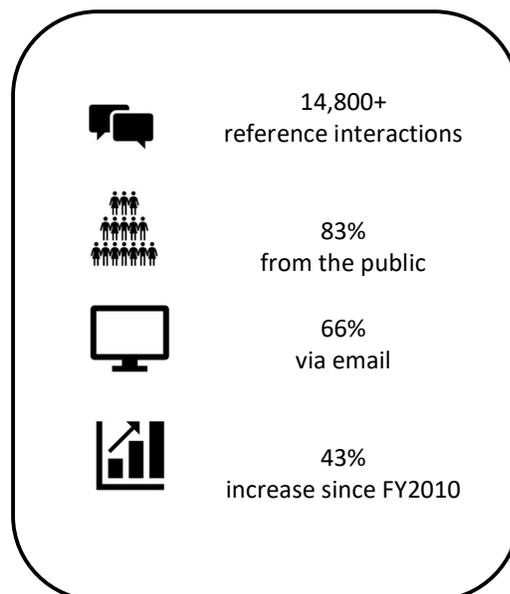
## MARYLAND THURGOOD MARSHALL STATE LAW LIBRARY

# Reference Report and Statistics Analysis Fiscal Year 2022 (July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022)

### Reference Highlights

Library reference statistics are reviewed annually to examine details of 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 Report 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 Report 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 Report include information about Library visitors who do not interact with staff, such as Judiciary staff or local attorneys who occupy research carrels and use Library resources but may not consult with staff for research assistance, or public patrons who access the Library’s public computers independently. The Report 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*.



### 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 general 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 Rules?”) 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 Information Service to the Public](#) and the [Guidelines for E-Mail Reference Services](#) adopted by the State Law Library Committee.



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### Collection of Statistics

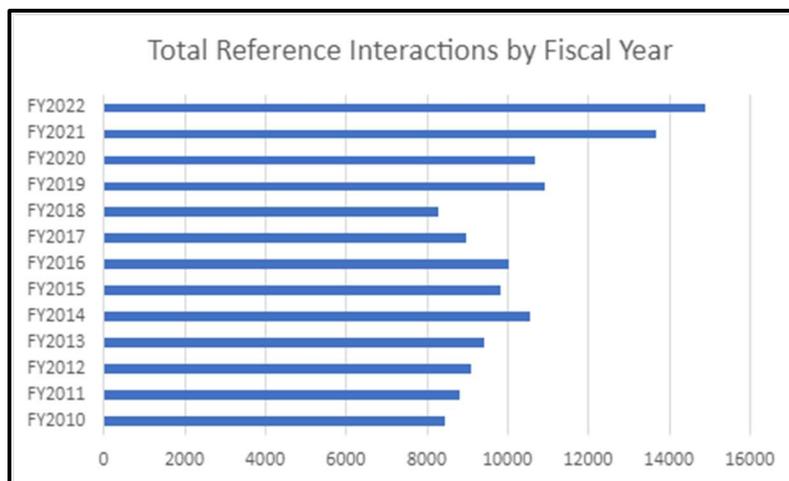
Patron interaction statistics are collected based on categories recommended by the Conference of Maryland Court Law Library Directors (CMCLLD). These include format, location of inquiry, patron type, question type, and duration of each interaction.

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, using an 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 responsibility for staff. The new RMS allows for a more detailed level of statistics collection. The presentation of those numbers contrasts significantly from earlier fiscal years. As the RMS was implemented several months into the fiscal year, conversions were established to enable the presentation of statistics and metrics in a comparable manner to prior years. Looking ahead to FY2023, the presentation of statistics will shift to align with the new system. Thus, as these FY2022 statistics and next year's FY2023 statistics may, on their face, appear significantly different, the narrative accompanying the numbers will be critical for understanding comparative Library workload.

### Statistical Summary

In keeping with an overall trend, the number of FY2022 patron interactions rose 9% over FY2021.

This increase may reflect that the library facility became more physically-accessible with the relaxation of pandemic restrictions; or it may simply be part of the continuing growth of interest in locating legal information by self-represented litigants and other members of the public.



### 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.



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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 demand a proportional increase in reference staff workload.

The Library endeavors to facilitate seamless contact with information needs. 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. Though invisible to patrons, making these resources available and accessible to patrons requires extensive Library staff time and involvement.

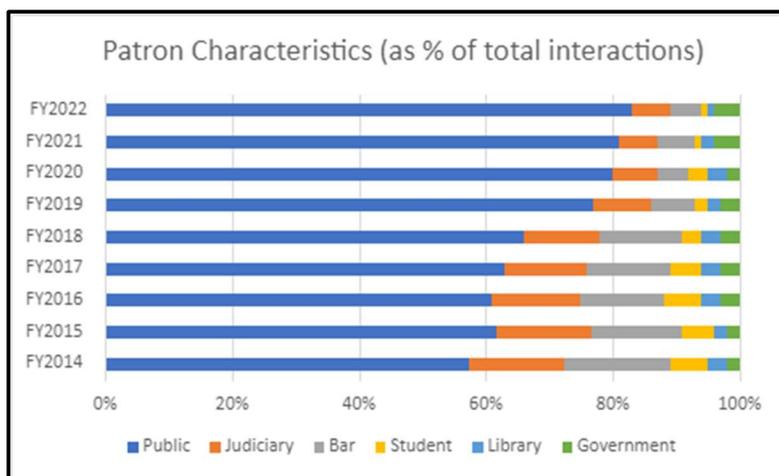
Through these digital initiatives, particularly the PLL content development, the Library's public patrons are able to self-fill information needs, often without visiting the Library. When visiting, the Library's public computers and wifi network enable patrons to connect to databases throughout the facility, often with no direct staff contact.

The Library puts equally strong emphasis on meeting our Judiciary patrons' needs through invisible and seamless connections. As with non-Judiciary patrons, many Judiciary information needs are met without direct contact with reference staff. Many of the Library's fee-based access points (databases) are accessible via the Judiciary's network to court staff statewide. Connection to these resources means that Judiciary staff are able to address simpler requests with fewer in-person library staff interactions. However, when there are more complex needs, the interactions are more extensive.

#### 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)
- Motor Vehicles (online payment of citations, provisional license limits)
- Real Property (deeds, ownership disputes, neighbor disputes)
- Civil Actions (responding to a complaint, judgment collection, witness testimony)



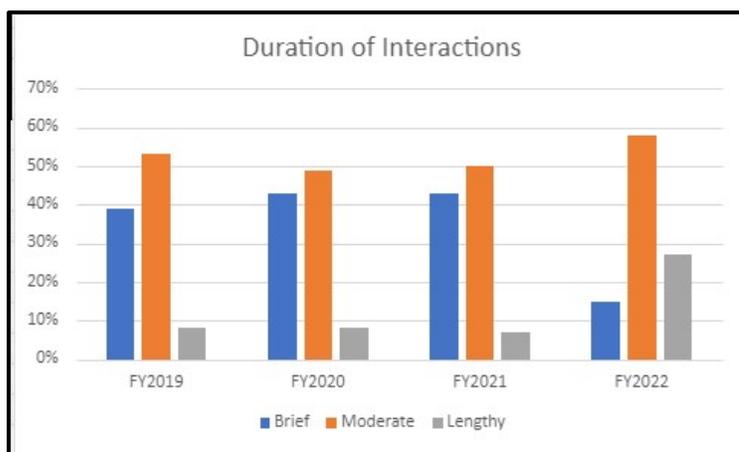


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### Question Duration

To aid in understanding reference staff workload, the Library tracks the duration of interactions (how long for staff to complete an interaction). In the prior tracking system, interactions were tagged in ranges according to how much time was needed to complete a request (e.g., 15-30 minutes). The new RMS tracks total minutes for each interaction. For example, if one staff member completed a request in 3 minutes, the system would log those 3 minutes for the one request. In the prior tracking system, that request would have been recorded as the category <5 minutes. If another request took three staff people each 30 minutes to complete, the system reflects a total of 90 minutes for the one request; in the prior system, each of those three staff would record a 15-30 minute interaction.

Per CMCLLD guidelines, the Library tracks statistics for Brief (<5 minutes), Moderate (6-30 minutes) and Lengthy (>30 minutes). In the most recent prior fiscal years, brief (<5 minutes) comprised about 40% of the total interactions. In FY2022, the same category comprises only 15% of the total. The chart reflects the numbers from FY2019 through FY2022, for illustrative purposes, noting that with the change in methodologies, the comparisons are not necessarily equivalent.



Lengthy interactions are generally 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 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

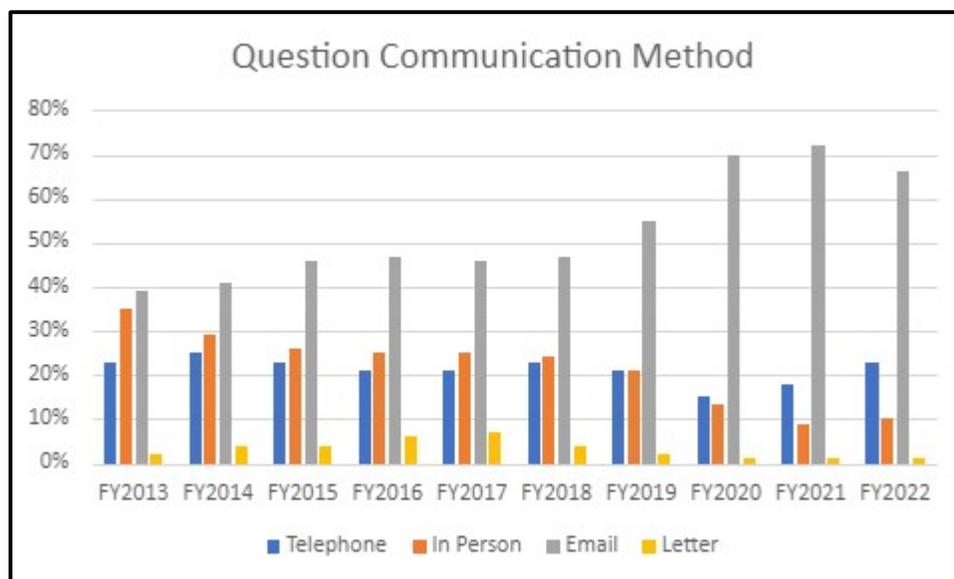
Patrons communicate with the Library through several methods, including in person, by telephone, via email, and through standard mail. During FY2020 and FY2021, as illustrated below, telephone and (in particular) in-person assistance constituted a smaller percentage of overall reference activity. FY2022 saw a return to “normal” levels of telephone activity. However, it is significant that, though restrictions



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lifted and the Library operates at pre-pandemic hours and availability, the in-person visitor number in FY2022 is still well below the pre-pandemic percentage; and email contact has remained high.



*\*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 the growth over the past decade and more.

As the Library moves forward with use of the reference management system, the ability to collect more 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.