How to Research the Law

How to Start Your Research

- What is the legal question you need to answer?
- Does the question involve federal, state, and/or local law?
- Which court or government agency can resolve the conflict?
- Get organized. Take notes as you go and keep all documents in one place like a binder or folder.
- Write down where you found the law for later reference.

Where to Look

1. Internet Resources:
   - Be sure to use reliable internet resources. If you are researching a Maryland issue, be sure the website you visit references Maryland law and not the law of another state or country.
   - There are a variety of reliable internet resources including mdcourts.gov, peoples-law.org, and mdcourts.gov/lawlib. You can also try other state websites like the Office of the Secretary of State or the General Assembly.

2. Print Resources:
   - The Maryland Code, COMAR, court opinions, legal encyclopedias, treatises, and articles can be found in print at a law library.

How to Research a Legal Topic

1. Start with a general overview.
   - Websites like mdcourts.gov and peoples-law.org are good places to start. You can also try a legal encyclopedia, treatise, or article.

2. Narrow your search.
   - Find statutes in the Maryland Code at: www.lawlib.state.md.us/researchtools/sourcesmdlaw.html
   - Find regulations in COMAR. Online at: www.dsd.state.md.us/comar
   - Find case law using an online source like Lexis (fee), Westlaw (fee), or Google Scholar (free).

3. Cite check to make sure the law is not outdated.
   - You can use Lexis to “Shepardize” or Westlaw to “Key Cite.”
   - If you have questions or need help, talk to a law librarian.

For More Information:

- Contact a local law library or the Maryland State Law Library at mdcourts.gov/lawlib.