

**Maryland State Law Library  
Reference Statistics, Report & Analysis  
Fiscal Year 2016 (July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016)**

**Overall Reference Services**

Library staff handled a total of 10,051 information interactions during FY2016. This constitutes a rise of 2% from the FY2015 total, and continues a steady rise over time since FY2010.

Fiscal Year	Total Requests	% Change
FY2016	10051	2%
FY2015	9818	-9.2%
FY2014	10567	11.9%
FY2013	9440	3.70%
FY2012	9099	3.10%
FY2011	8827	4.20%
FY2010	8471	---

**Who is asking for assistance?**

The Library provides reference assistance to a diverse array of patrons. The array includes three main groups, generally divided into the Judiciary, the Bar, and the Public. Each of these larger groups includes multiple subdivisions; Judiciary includes judges, law clerks, and administrative staff; Bar includes private and pro bono attorneys, law firm staff and paralegals; and Public includes not only self-represented litigants (SRLs), but also general legal researchers, students, historians, and genealogists.

*Patron Categories FY2016*

Patron Category	# of Inquiries	% of Total
Public	2909	60.5%
Judiciary	707	14.7%
Bar	640	13.3%
Student	278	5.8%
Library	141	2.9%
Government	124	2.6%
Other	13	0.3%
Total	4812	100%

Patron type information is gathered for in-person, telephone, and letter inquiries using Gimlet. Neither email nor chat sessions are identified by patron type at this time.

For FY2016, 4812 interactions were recorded on Gimlet. Of the total 10,051 interactions, this constitutes 48%, or about half. 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 Fiscal Year Comparison*

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

**Spotlight: Services to Correctional Facility Residents**

The Library classifies correctional residents as “public”, and assists requests from such residents in the same manner as, and with the same parameters as, any other member of the public. Correctional residents can be identified statistically by their (generally) required method of communication, that is, almost 100% of written letters received by Library reference staff come from correctional residents. The number of phone calls received from correctional residents is statistically insignificant, amounting to perhaps one or two calls a year.

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Through FY2015, reference requests received via letter were enumerated separately from the Gimlet system. During FY2016, staff began adding letter reference questions to the Gimlet database. Prior to the Gimlet recording, it was not possible to gauge the hours spent on letter reference, as the hand-tracking did not record the length of the interaction. The Gimlet recording made it possible to begin analyzing time invested in this particular arena of reference. Of the total 103 letters recorded in the overall statistics, 97 were recorded on Gimlet.

Duration (minutes)	Number of Letters	% of Letter Total	Total Non-Letter Questions	% Non-Letter Total
0-5	1	1%	2607	55.3%
6-15	30	31%	1397	29.6%
16-30	25	25.7%	479	10.2%
31-60	26	26.8%	149	3.2%
60+	15	15.5%	83	1.7%
Total	97	100%	4715	100%

There is almost an inverse relationship between the length of time invested in each letter versus the length of time invested in each non-letter request: the bulk of the non-letter requests, 84.9%, take under 15 minutes to complete a response; of the letters, only 32%, or one third, take fewer than 15 minutes to handle.

It may be a more relevant comparison to look at email replies against letter replies, as it may be simply the written transaction itself that requires additional time. Email interactions are recorded outside of the Gimlet system at this time, but may be added in the future, which would allow for such a comparison.

In the FY2015 Report, the Library's statistics on correspondence with inmates were examined, showing a rising trend. The number of letters received continued to rise in FY2016, from an average of seven (7) monthly to an average of nine (9) monthly, constituting a 24% rise from the prior year, and a 239% rise since FY2004.

*Number of letters received from correctional residents by fiscal year*

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

**What are they asking?**

*What are our patrons asking about? How complicated are the questions they are asking? What is the time involved (duration) in handling inquiries? What assistance is needed from the Library staff in addressing the inquiries?*

**Question Type**

The majority of interactions fall, not surprisingly and again, into the Reference category. The percentages appear to be relatively steady from FY2015 to FY2016.

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Looking solely at the Reference category, the bulk of interactions are “General”. As noted in the FY2015 Report, because so many reference interactions fall into “General”, it may be appropriate to discuss further breakdowns in the Reference category, to determine more closely where the need for assistance is. Toward the end of FY2016, new topical tags were added to the Library’s Gimlet system. These may help provide additional information for analysis in the FY2017 Report.

*Question Type Breakdowns*

Question Type	Total FY16	Percentage FY16	Percentage FY15
Reference – General	3001	62.4%	61%
Reference – Legislative History	168	3.5%	3%
Reference – Online/Computer	151	3.1%	4%
Directional	504	10.5%	8%
Referral	205	4.3%	3%
Tech Assistance	357	7.4%	8%
Other – Circulation	144	3.0%	4%
Other – Payment Only	274	5.7%	9%

**Spotlight: Staff Technology Assistance**

Two of the reference categories indicate a connection to the use of technology: Reference-Online/Computer and Other-Tech Assistance. While the two categories were established to measure different facets of a question, the underlying concept in both is the same: the patron needs assistance from Library staff in using technology. As more information and more government interaction becomes technology-based, there is a presumption that the average citizen is able to keep up with the

*Percentage of requests for technology assistance*

Fiscal Year	Tech Assist	Ref Online	Combined	% of Total Interactions
FY2013	103	200	303	7%
FY2014	278	274	552	9.4%
FY2015	370	203	573	11.8%
FY2016	357	151	508	10.5%

knowledge needed to use such technology. If this is the case, the percentage needing staff assistance should decrease. Instead, the Library is seeing an increase in the percentage of patrons needing assistance from staff on technology-related issues. The numbers for FY2016 decreased slightly, but are still showing an overall upward trend from FY2013, when the categories were first tracked. These numbers bear watching.

**Duration of Questions**

The Duration category is used to help understand the amount of staff time and effort needed to address reference desk interactions. A longer duration interaction reflects either:

- 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;

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- the level of need or challenge that the patron presents; for instance, Library patrons with a low level of understanding of the legal system, terminology and research methods require more attention and time from staff.

For FY2016, staff began including letters from correctional residents on the Gimlet system. These letters require more time, on average, than phone or walk-in requests (see above, Spotlight: Services to Correctional Residents). This may be the reason for the substantial increase in numbers for lengthy interactions. The Library will continue to monitor for developing trends.

*Duration of Questions*

In minutes	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016
0-5	3638 (62.2%)	2906 (60.0%)	2608 (54.2%)
6-15	1510 (25.8%)	1321 (27.3%)	1427 (29.7%)
16-30	543 (9.3%)	427 (8.8%)	504 (10.5%)
31-60	83 (1.4%)	119 (2.5%)	175 (3.6%)
60+	72 (1.2%)	68 (1.4%)	98 (2.0%)

Letters may require more time simply because of the time involved in structuring a written reply. Email interactions, which also require a written reply, are recorded outside of the Gimlet system at this time. Once duration analysis can be completed for email interactions and compared to letter interactions, this may become clearer.

## When are they asking?

### Days of the Week

The Library is open six days of the week according to the following schedule:

- Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- Tuesday and Thursday, 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.
- Saturday, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Because the Library is open late on Tuesdays and Thursdays, the number of patron interactions is expected to be higher on those days.

*Patron Interactions by Weekday*

Weekday	Interactions	%
Sunday	0	0%
Monday	726	15.1%
Tuesday	1102	22.9%
Wednesday	696	14.5%
Thursday	1183	24.6%
Friday	788	16.4%
Saturday	317	6.6%

Saturday interactions account for 6.6% of the total, similar to the FY2015 percentage of 6.9. As in FY2015, this is about half of the number generally found on weekdays when the Library is open during regular business hours (M/W/F). The analysis in the FY2015 Report is therefore still the understanding for staffing level purposes (see FY2015 Reference Statistics, Report & Analysis).

Comparing the number of hours the Library is open each weekday to the number of questions received shows that for FY 2016, Friday had the highest question count for weekdays and Wednesday the lowest. During FY2015 the converse was true: Friday had the lowest question count and Wednesday the highest. Therefore at this time, no conclusion can be drawn as to question flow related to weekday (see table, next page).

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*Questions per Hour Blocks*

Weekday	# Questions	# Hours Library is Open	Questions per Hour (avg/annual)	Questions per Hour FY2015
Monday	726	8.5	85.4	88.5
Tuesday	1102	13	84.8	89.2
Wednesday	696	8.5	81.9	94.2
Thursday	1183	13	91	85.9
Friday	788	8.5	92.7	79.6
Saturday	317	7	45.3	47.9
Total	4812	70	68.7	69.2

*Note: the above numbers include only interactions recorded on Gimlet and not email requests*

**Time of Day**

The largest number of questions came in between 10:00 am and noon, and again between 1:00pm and 4:00pm. This is understandable as 8:00 – 4:30 are “normal business hours” for the Judiciary, with most people likely having their productive hours from mid-morning until lunchtime, then from post-lunch until stopping to clear up before leaving at the end of the business day.

There has been no change to these identified blocks from prior fiscal years; the Library will continue to monitor for any changes.

Time of Day	Questions
7:00 AM	6
8:00 AM	157
9:00 AM	397
10:00 AM	510
11:00 AM	605
12:00 PM	459
1:00 PM	519
2:00 PM	527
3:00 PM	604
4:00 PM	460
5:00 PM	201
6:00 PM	119
7:00 PM	105
8:00 PM	118
9:00 PM	25

**How and where are they asking?**

*(What communication methods are our patrons using to access us?)*

Patrons can contact the Library using five different communications methods: in person; by telephone; via e-mail; through chat (live or follow-up); and using regular mail (letters). Email, in-person and telephone inquiries combined constitute 93% of all incoming patron inquiries.

The changes from FY2015 are minimal; as always, the Library will monitor for any significant trends.

*Question Format FY2015*

Question Format	# of Requests	% in FY2016	% in FY2015
Telephone	2,082	20.7%	23.1%
In-Person	2,525	25.1%	25.8%
Email	4,749	47.3%	45.7%
Chat	297	3%	4.6%
Letters	103	1%	0.8%
Interlibrary Loan	295	2.9%	n/a
Total	10,051	100%	100%

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Looking at prior fiscal years FY2011 through FY2015, the overall number of incoming reference inquiries has been steadily growing. How the question comes to the Library, however, has changed.

The percentage of requests coming by email continues to grow, while telephone and in-person requests continue to fall. From a statistics collection viewpoint, this may mean that moving forward, the Library will need to determine how to record more detailed statistics on email requests, i.e., begin recording email requests in Gimlet; otherwise, the current method of multiplying Gimlet numbers by two to estimate total numbers on the details will be skewed in terms of staff time.

In FY2016, chat numbers fell. It will take time to see if that is a trend, and if so, what is causing that trend.

*Question Format Percentages by Fiscal Year*

Question Format	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16
<b>Telephone</b>	2916 (33%)	2455 (27%)	2180 (23%)	2656 (25%)	2264 (23%)	2082 (20.7%)
<b>In-Person</b>	3100 (35%)	3204 (35%)	3271 (35%)	3102 (29%)	2533 (26%)	2525 (25.1%)
<b>Email</b>	2639 (30%)	3121 (34%)	3657 (39%)	4354 (41%)	4491 (46%)	4749 (47.3%)
<b>Chat</b>	102 (1%)	235 (3%)	246 (3%)	369 (4%)	452 (4.6%)	297 (3%)
<b>Letters</b>	72 (1%)	84 (1%)	86 (1%)	86 (1%)	78 (.7%)	103 (1%)
<b>Total</b>	8829	9099	9440	10567	9818	10,051

*Note: ILL numbers were not tracked separately prior to FY2016; however, as they constitute only 2.9% of the total, the impact on the overall trend is likely not statistically significant.*

It may also be of interest to note that, while actual numbers of letter requests rose, the overall percentage of the total number of requests has stayed static, at 1%. Pointing back to the analysis of letter requests (herein, page 2), it should be noted that each letter takes more staff time than each telephone or in-person request; therefore, even if letters remain 1% of the overall total, the time invested in responding will in fact increase.

## Conclusion

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

- The overall number of reference interactions continues to rise;
- The number of interactions with identified public patrons continues to constitute over 60% of the Library’s activity;
- While the bulk of non-letter requests take under 15 minutes, the bulk of letter requests, whose numbers continue to rise, take two to three times that time for each request;
- The number of letter requests remains at a steady 1% of the overall reference numbers;
- The number of inquiries requiring assistance with technology as a percentage of all questions remains steady;
- Weekday interaction numbers continue to be twice weekend numbers, which bears watching for desk staffing needs;
- Numbers of email questions continue to rise as a percentage against the whole, nearing almost 50% of the total number of interactions.