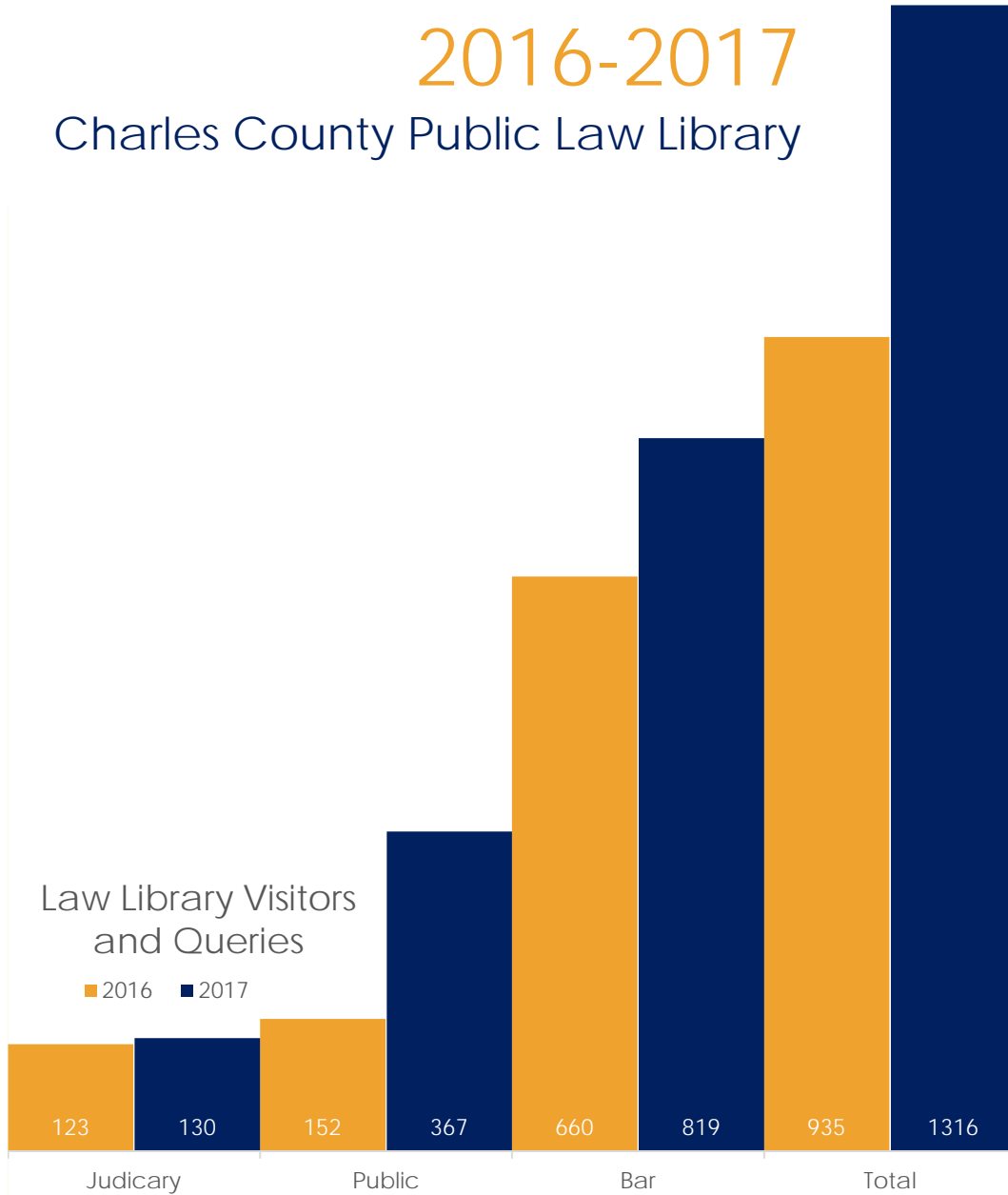


# LAW LIBRARIAN ANNUAL UPDATE 2016-2017

Charles County Public Law Library



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## About This Report

In November 2015, I joined the staff of the Circuit Court for Charles County as its law librarian, a position that had been vacant for over two years. In that time, judges and attorneys had learned to live without a law librarian, and the public had largely forgotten that the court even had a law library.

This report documents the results of my efforts to rectify that.

Today, the library's collection has been updated to meet the varied needs of its patrons. Judges, law clerks, and attorneys regularly consult the librarian on complex legal questions. Increasingly, members of the local community are also coming to the law library to use its services.

This report discusses the role and mission of the law library and its librarian, reviews the myriad changes that have occurred in the library over the past two years, and provides a glimpse of what is coming in the future.

*Mary Jo Lazun*  
*Law Librarian*  
*Charles County Public Law Library*



## Mission

The Charles County Public Law Library provides the community with the resources needed to participate knowledgeably in the due process of law. It offers sophisticated legal research tools and professional guidance in a welcoming and supportive environment that fosters inquiry and discussion.

## The Community

By statute, the Charles County Public Law Library serves the Circuit Court for Charles County. By extension, the law library also serves those who work and live in Southern Maryland.

The law library's patrons fall into three general categories: attorneys, the public, and judiciary and government employees.



## Attorneys

Attorneys make up the largest group of law library patrons. Most are solo practitioners or members of small firms. The substantial cost of many legal materials makes the law library's free access to Westlaw and Lexis, as well as books like *Fader's Maryland Family Law* and the current civil and criminal jury instructions, a major draw for many attorneys.<sup>1</sup>

With the advent of mandatory electronic filing, attorneys do not need to visit the courthouse nearly as often as they used to. A growing group of attorneys has discovered that they do not need to visit the law library in order to use it. They often submit their questions by email or phone.

Attorneys also use the law library as an "office away from the office." The library's public computers with internet access, scanner, and copier make it easy for attorneys to write an order or motion while in the field and receive documents from their main office.

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<sup>1</sup> A basic subscription to Westlaw or purchases of the *Maryland Law Encyclopedia* runs approximately \$5000 per year.



## The Public

The library's public patrons often arrive at the law library after being referred by court staff or, more recently, by public librarians. Many are seeking information on family law, the new expungement laws, and even how to file a writ of mandamus. The library's public computers make it possible for individuals who do not have a computer at home to draft legal documents.

## Judiciary and Government Employees

Although the smallest percentage of library users receive their paycheck from the government, often their questions are the most challenging. Law clerks are tasked with researching major issues for their judges. These may include new legislation or technologies, or areas in which Maryland's appellate courts have not issued a ruling.

The library ensures that the judges and magistrates have up-to-date versions of the Maryland Code and Rules in their chambers and courtrooms as well as any other legal materials the judges may request.





## The Collection

The library's collection is a mixture of online and print legal research materials.

### Online

- Legal databases including Westlaw, Lexis Advance, and HeinOnline.
- Tools to calculate child support (SASI-Calc) and alimony (Kauffman Alimony Guidelines)
- Maryland-specific legal forms in the areas of civil procedure, family law, estate planning, wills, employment law, and limited liability companies
- General legal forms including *American Jurisprudence Legal Forms* and *Pleading and Practice Forms*

### Print

- Current and superseded versions of the Maryland Code and Maryland Rules
- *Maryland Reports* and *Maryland Appellate Reports*
- Civil and criminal jury instructions
- *Maryland Sentencing Guidelines*
- More than 100 Maryland-specific legal research materials and legal practice materials including *Fader's Maryland Family Law*, *Pleading Causes of Action in Maryland*, *Maryland Criminal Law*, *Maryland Tort Law Handbook*, *Maryland Corporation Law*, *Maryland DWI Law*, and *Gibber on Estate Planning*
- A substantial collection of general legal materials in many areas of law including family law, legal practice, employment law, evidence, criminal law, criminal procedure, municipal corporations, non-profit law, the *Uniform Commercial Code*, civil rights, and constitutional law

## The Librarian

I provide a wide range of specialized professional services to patrons in person, over the phone, and via email. Legal reference is perhaps the most visible of these services.



## Accomplishments

### 2016

My primary focus during my first year at the Charles County Public Law Library was to reconstitute the library's collection and to update its hardware and software. Tasks included:

- Conducting a substantial review of the library's general legal books to remove materials that were highly dated or obsolete
- Updating the Maryland print collection to ensure the library received all Maryland treatises published by major legal publishers
- Adding WiFi so that patrons can bring their own devices to the law library
- Purchasing a new copier that also functions as a copier and scanner
- Changing the library's computer network to provide library patrons with access to Maryland State Law Library databases such as HeinOnline and Nolo publications
- Executing an informal agreement with the Maryland State Law Library to receive recent, discarded pocket parts at no cost for major legal materials that would otherwise be hopelessly obsolete

A second major goal of 2016 was to reach out the Charles County judges, their law clerks, and local attorneys. After becoming a regular attendee of the Charles County Bar Association's monthly meetings, the association's members voted to bestow honorary membership to the law librarian.

I was also honored to receive the Charles County Bar Association's 2017 Liberty Bell Award for outstanding service to the legal community.

### 2017

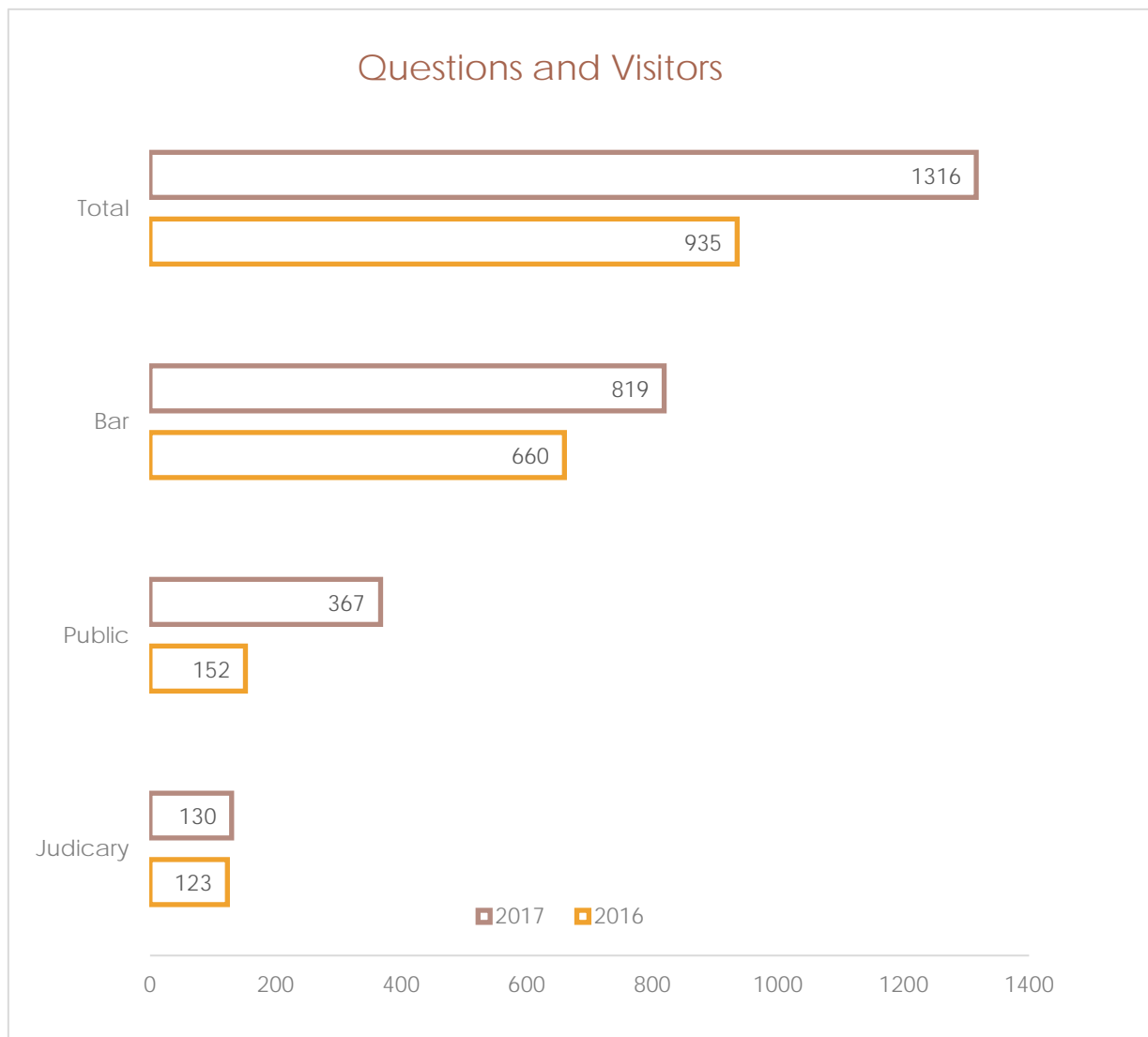
My major objective for 2017 was to increase public awareness of the law library and its services. Tasks included:

- Conducting informational sessions with most of the public librarians and staff in Charles, Calvert, and St. Mary's Counties to inform them of the availability and public nature of the law library and the services the law librarian can provide to their patrons

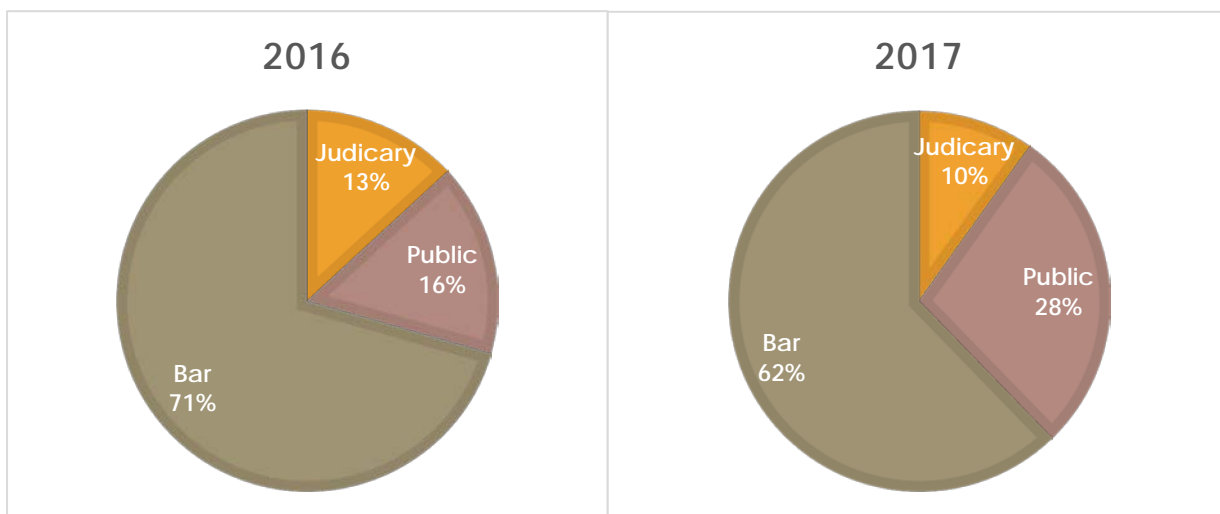
- Serving as liaison to local attorneys needing assistance with Maryland Electronic Courts (MDEC)
- Making “house calls” to local law firms to assist attorneys and paralegals in learning the MDEC system
- Updating the library’s Westlaw subscription to provide expanded access to secondary source materials
- Conducting library orientation sessions for law clerks to introduce them to resources that are available at the library
- Conducting training sessions for law clerks on using secondary sources to cut legal research time, locating superseded versions of the Maryland code, and using advanced online legal search techniques
- Initiating a monthly foreclosure clinic with attorneys from the Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service to provide legal advice to citizens in Southern Maryland who are facing foreclosure
- Working with the judges of the Circuit Court for Charles County to define a core collection of legal materials to be made available in each of the five courtrooms
- Updating the library’s WiFi access so that patrons can automatically join the network

## The Results

Outreach efforts throughout 2017 have had dramatic results. Over the past calendar year, the Charles County Public Law library saw **a 30% increase in use** over 2016: **Over 1,300 people** either visited, emailed, or called the law library. An average of **110 people per month** used the library's services.



The demographics of the library's patrons also saw a noteworthy shift during 2017, with **a significant increase in use by members of the public**. In 2016, the public represented 16% of its visitors; in 2017 almost 30% of law library visitors were members of the public.





## Ask the Law Librarian

### What kinds of questions does a court law librarian answer?

Last year, the Charles County Public Law Library assisted **an average of 100 patrons a month** with their queries about all aspects of the law. To illustrate the diversity of questions the library handles on a typical day, **below is a complete list of inquiries received on just one day: December 1, 2017.**

#### From Attorneys

- Can a protective order be filed if more than 30 days have elapsed since the event?
- Are there different rules or case law for how a general subpoena can be filed for a corporation, and what are the requirements for the person issuing the subpoena to identify a specific person or the specific information they want?
- How do I print a document from my Gmail account?
- Can I email cases from Westlaw to my personal email account?
- Can you help me find the rule or statute that says that an LLC that has forfeited its charter cannot sue in Maryland?

#### From the Judiciary

- Where is URESA is codified?
- Would you please locate CJP 3-602 from 1984?
- Can you find information on how subject-matter jurisdiction is defined in Maryland for child custody cases?

#### From the Public

- How do I correct the birthdate on a birth certificate?
- Where can I find cases about ineffective assistance of counsel?
- When is the general legal clinic held?
- Can you assist me in locating an attorney who handled a particular case?
- How do I find out if any grievances have been filed against an attorney?

I was able to answer twelve of the thirteen questions that same day; the remaining question arrived late in the day, and I was able to answer it the following morning.



## Making a Difference

**Law librarians have a unique opportunity to help people make positive changes in their lives. Here is one story.**

"Tom" has been a regular at the Charles County Law Library for some time. In fact, he regularly corresponded with my predecessor while he was incarcerated. During his time in prison, Tom accumulated a significant amount of child support debt.

After being released from prison, Tom found a job in construction. When he was subsequently let go, Tom applied for unemployment benefits. His application was denied. Tom appealed the decision to the unemployment commission's appeals division, which also denied his claim. Undeterred, Tom took his appeal to the Circuit Court for Charles County.

Tom had a gut feeling that the law was on his side, and he spent

a lot of time at the library searching Westlaw for case law to back up that instinct. When he discussed his circumstances with me, I suggested that he review the appeals digest from the Unemployment Commission. This hidden but fantastic resource organizes the Commission's key administrative decisions by statute and section.



Consulting the digest, Tom quickly zeroed in on the appropriate statute and found what looked like the perfect decision. Unfortunately, the actual decision wasn't available for download, so I faxed a request for the case to the Department of Labor Licensing and Regulation, which arrived the following day.

At his next court date, Tom arrived with a faxed copy of his decision to share with the Unemployment Commission's attorney and the judge. A new hearing was set so that everyone would have a chance to review the case. At the subsequent hearing, the judge ruled in Tom's favor and remanded the case to the Unemployment Commission for their reconsideration based on the decision that Tom had found at the law library.

A couple of weeks later, Tom learned that he had won his appeal and that the money

he was due would be arriving soon. I could tell that he was so proud of himself. He thanked me for my help, and for finding the case. I reminded him that it was he who found the case; I just showed him where to look for it.

The impact of this win is huge, not for just Tom, but also for the community. Tom was able to put a sizable down payment on his child support debt, probably enough to get his driver's license and his contractor's license reinstated. This means that Tom will soon be working as a contractor in his community once again, providing employment not just for himself but for others as well.

## What's Next?

**Here are a few projects that are on the horizon for 2018.**

- New furniture will be arriving in the Spring to replace much of the current furniture
- I am working with the Southern Maryland Regional Library Association to have the library's catalog of legal materials included in COSMOS, the catalog for the public libraries in Charles, St. Mary's, and Calvert counties, to expand the visibility of the law library's resources throughout Southern Maryland
- I will be attending advanced training to assist members of the bar and self-represented litigants in the use of MDEC as part of a statewide initiative to have law librarians serve as a primary point of contact for attorneys
- In partnership with the Access to Justice Commission and the Maryland Conference of Court Law Library Directors, I am participating in a project to train public librarians in answering legal reference questions



## Thank-You Notes

**Over the past two years, I have has received many compliments from patrons. Here is a sampling of those comments.**

"You are a gem!"

"Thanks to your help with the original research on this case, I won the appeals on both issues that I was appealing. Thanks for your help with the original research on this case."

"You are my 'ace in the hole!'"

"Thanks a million. Yes, it worked, and again your assistance is greatly appreciated."

"I love you! Thank you for this, I did not know it was out yet."

"Thankyouthankyouthankyou!!"

"This is a tremendous help, thank you! I do believe our Executive Director will also have a lawyer review this document before it is implemented."

"Thanks! You solved my issue, although not in my client's favor."

"I really enjoyed working with you. I look forward to working and learning more from you. See you soon and thanks for following up with me!"