

2016

Public Law Library of King County
Annual Report



Mission

Without access to information, there is no justice. Public Law Library of King County aids all persons with their need for legal information by providing legal materials,



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Public Law Library of King County

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Letter from Executive Director, Barbara Engstrom

As the new Executive Director of the Public Law Library of King County, it is a pleasure to write this Annual Report for 2016. The law library had a busy and productive year. Assistant Director Rick Stroup admirably led the law library as Interim Director for most of the year until I came on board in September of 2016.

One of the things that I quickly realized about the law library is that it is quite a complex operation being run by a lean and very efficient staff. The law library is not a part of King County but is, rather, a creature of state statute. It is run independently which means that there are many plates spinning in the air at all times. In the three months of my tenure at the law library thus far, I am continually amazed by the number and quality of services provided by the law library staff. Here's a short sampling of what our staff manages: 8 conference rooms in Seattle and Kent that are available for reservations, over 1600 annual subscriptions for attorneys, judges, and the public, and the coordination of partner legal clinics sponsored by the KCBA Neighborhood Legal Clinic, the KCBA Young Lawyer's Division Clinic, the NW Justice Project's Debt Collection Defense Clinic, and the Columbia Legal Services Re-Entry Clinic.

While services such as these are important, the core of our service, however, is our availability to offer reference assistance anyone who asks for help either in person, by phone or by email. In Seattle, over fifty five thousand people visited the law library at the King County Courthouse in 2016 and we answered over fifteen thousand reference questions. In Kent, almost thirty thousand people visited the law library at the MRJC and we answered almost eight thousand reference questions.

As noted in last year's annual report, much of 2015 was spent planning and preparing for the law library's new Legal Help Center (LHC). The center was envisioned as a legal aid clinic for pro se patrons making help available at the time and point of greatest need. Our proximity to the clerk's office in both Seattle and Kent makes the law library a critical resource for those having difficulties submitting forms to the clerk's office. While there are many civil legal aid clinics that offer limited legal advice, the Legal Help Center hopes to build upon those services by assisting patrons with completing legal forms and documents, a task that most limited legal advice clinics do not have the time or capacity to do. Ideally, the LHC and our partner legal clinics will function collaboratively to provide legal help in a variety of ways and means.

2016 Financial Report

Income

Filing Fees	\$736,355
Fee-Based Services	\$79,800
Other Income	\$325,282
Total	\$1,141,437

Expenditures -

Seattle

Books & Periodicals	\$404,352
Non-Book: Operating	\$62,650
Non-Book:	\$458,431
Payroll/Benefits	
Capital	\$953
Total	\$926,386

Expenditures – MRJC

Books & Periodicals	\$60,042
Non-Book: Operating	\$20,009
Non-Book:	\$152,516
Payroll/Benefits	
Capital	\$350
Total	\$232,917



On January 4, 2016, after several years of planning, PLLKC opened its Legal Help Center in a “beta” or test version at the Seattle library two days a week. The Board had adopted the policy that the LHC would attempt to help on any issue that patrons asked about and that there would be no income qualification, that is, the LHC would not require that patrons be at or near poverty level income earners.

The two days a week quickly turned to three days a week, Monday, Tuesday, and Friday mornings from 9:00 to 12:00. As a consequence, the Seattle library now provides access to free legal help to its patrons during part of every weekday. The Legal Help Center, on the three mornings it operates, and on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays the when the law library hosts partner legal clinics. The partner legal clinics are staffed, depending on the day of the week, by several organizations: Northwest Justice Project, King County Bar Association, and KCBA’s Young Lawyers Division. Once a month a Re-entry Clinic staffed by Columbia Legal Services is hosted.

After three months of testing and smoothing out policy questions and logistics for the LHC, the library hosted an official grand opening celebration on April 14, 2016. The Board had previously passed a resolution to officially name the Center the Rita R. Dermody Legal Help Center, in honor of the library’s immediate past director. Rita Dermody had been the motivating force, along with Steve Ellis of the Board, for creation of the Legal Help Center.

Both Rita and Steve attended the grand opening ceremony as did about 20 others. Washington Supreme Court Justice Mary Yu delivered the keynote address. Justice Yu had served as the President of the PLLKC Board of Trustees during part of her tenure as a Judge of the King County Superior Court. Also at the opening, Judge Andrea Darvas, at the time the President of the Board, delivered a few remarks and helped dedicate the Center in Rita’s honor.

Shortly after the grand opening, the LHC also started giving legal help all day on Thursdays at the law library at the Maleng Regional Justice Center. The LHC at MRJC has grown to be very popular often serving around 10 – 15 patrons on a given Thursday, a number equivalent to the number helped on three days in Seattle.

GRAND OPENING OF THE LEGAL HELP CENTER

**By: Marc Lampson,
Public Services Attorney**



BY THE NUMBERS

In 2016 as a whole, we helped over 85,000 people between our two branches, either in person, over the phone or via email. Our six conference rooms were used 343 times by the local bar and government users and 312 times to host the five legal aid clinics with whom we partnered.

We tracked the questions we received to gain a better understanding of the help our patrons needed, which in turn drove the development of content on our web site and influenced how we spent our funds for paper and electronic resources. The “wordle” or word cloud above is derived directly from these questions and presents a visual representation of the information our patrons ask us for each day. Questions related to probate and estate planning, to divorce and family law, to housing and eviction issues and to court procedures were asked most frequently.

Patrons Served

85,758

Questions Answered

13,554

Meeting Rooms Used

655 sessions

Public PC Sessions

12,948