



Bar Bulletin

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Delivery of Legal Services to Maryland Public Librarians

By **Sandy Brewer and Dave Pantzer** | May 12, 2016

Each year, the use of public library services rises as our state's population increases. Along with this increase in library customers, the number of people who need, but struggle to afford legal help, continues to grow. So it follows that more and more self-represented litigants will find themselves in a public library. There are many reasons for why a litigant may be self-represented; whether the individual has low income or feels confident on her/his own, whatever the reason, library customers expect public librarians to have answers to their legal informational questions.

One effective way to empower self-represented litigants is to empower those individuals who interact with self-represented litigants. As a result, over the past year, the MSBA **Delivery of Legal Services Section** has made it a priority to conduct outreach initiatives with public librarians, to better assist members of the public who are in need of legal information. To further this endeavor, members of the Council traveled to the public library systems of Howard County, Washington County, and Baltimore City – training, informing and educating public librarians, who strive to meet the evolving needs of patrons in their respective communities, by directing them to local pro bono committees, legal services organizations, and online self-help resources.

The Section developed the first training event at a branch of the Howard County Library System in Ellicott City, where library staff members received educational credits. On that afternoon, our goal was to enable library staff to exceed their future customers' legal informational needs. Council members discussed available local and state legal resources, while demonstrating real life question/answer scenarios. Additionally, we

discussed the distinction between legal information and legal advice. This portion of the event proved to be a favorite for many of the librarians in attendance.

For our second educational event at the Washington County Free Library in Hagerstown, we were asked to present two sessions in one day. The first event was open only to library staff, where Council members provided an in-depth introduction to the People's Law Library website and its useful links. The second session was open to the public, so members of the Council emphasized local, legal resources to arm library customers with tools to help answer their legal informational questions.

In Baltimore City, at the Council's third event of 2015, we were invited to speak at one of the Enoch Pratt Free Library's monthly manager meetings. This was our first event that included only public library branch managers. After fielding many questions at the end of the session, Council members felt confident that attendees and their respective staff members will be able to locate relevant, legal information and provide referrals – with an ability to use that information effectively.

Members of the Delivery of Legal Services Council look forward to reaching an even broader audience when we deliver a presentation at the Maryland Library Association/Delaware Library Association Joint Conference in Ocean City this month.

As the Section strives to meet the needs of those who do not qualify for legal aid, yet lack the resources for full legal representation, we work to ensure that these events are more than interesting and informative. Through our outreach initiatives, we improve access to legal services to Marylanders by educating those of moderate incomes, thereby positively impacting customers' lives and reflecting the Maryland bar in a positive light.

Sandy Brewer, a National Center for State Courts Certified Court Executive, manages the Law Library and Legal Resource Center for the Circuit Court for Howard County, and also serves on both the MSBA Section on the Delivery of Legal Services and the Howard County Pro Bono Committee. Dave Pantzer manages the People's Law Library, serves as vice-chair of the MSBA Section on the Delivery of Legal Services, and serves on the board of the Pro Bono Resource Center.

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