

**CONTRA COSTA COUNTY PUBLIC LAW LIBRARY
ANNUAL REPORT TO TRUSTEES AND BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
July 2019 – June 2020**



INTRODUCTION:

Business and Professions Code §6340 mandates that each county in California have a law library located in the county seat. Contra Costa County is highly compliant, having a main branch of the law library in Martinez as well as a smaller branch inside the Richmond Courthouse. The Contra Costa County Public Law Library serves everyone, including the general public, judicial officers, members of the bar, and students.

MISSION OF THE LIBRARY:

The library's mission statement guides the activities of the library: *To provide all members of the community access to research materials to aid in understanding and preserving legal rights.* Law library trustees and staff want the people of Contra Costa County to recognize the law library as their primary source for legal information. The law library strives to render the highest quality of service to the community by providing a current, balanced collection of materials and resources along with trained staff dedicated to assisting users in meeting their legal information needs.

FUNDING:

- The amount of funding public law libraries receive from tax-based sources is zero. County law libraries in California receive over 90% of their funding from a small portion of civil court filing fees.
- In Fiscal Year 2019-20, 91% of the law library's revenue was derived from civil filing fees.
- Senate Bill 1407, passed in 2007, established a moratorium on increases in filing fees. The moratorium was later extended. The result has been an inability of law libraries to increase their primary revenue source despite the fact that the cost of legal materials rises an average of 10-15% per year.
- During that same time period, the Contra Costa County Public Law Library's filing fee revenues declined 39%.
- Other factors, including filing fee reductions granted to select individuals, and fee waivers, along with changes in the jurisdictional limits for small claims court during the last decade, have contributed to declining revenues, not only for law libraries, but also for the courts.
- A ten-week courthouse closure, and resulting closure of the Law Library, also had a negative effect on revenues.
- County law libraries throughout California are experiencing the same revenue shortfalls that we are seeing in Contra Costa County, all the while, the number of self-represented litigants seeking help in California's county law libraries continues to grow.
- The Council of California County Law Librarians has been working to seek solutions to this complex and serious problem for many years, but there is still not a viable plan, such as a piece of legislation, in place to protect funding for county law libraries, although the governor did approve a budget which included some emergency funding for county law libraries.

- After a decade of frozen funding, county law libraries in California were awarded a one-time allotment of bail-out funds in the amount of \$16.5 million, collectively. In accordance with the library's commitment to providing excellent service to our users, the funds, totaling \$551,632 received in late 2018, have been used to address staffing shortages and gaps in the collection caused by reductions necessitated by the funding crisis.
- Another smaller allotment of bail-out funds designed to offset the losses from the 10-week closure in 2020 has been promised to county law libraries.
- Creating sustainable funding for California's county law libraries is a critical goal for the future. Sustainability for the law library is estimated at 5 years, based on the current revenue stream. This means that unless changes are made in the way county law libraries in California are funded, the future of all law libraries, including the Contra Costa County Public Law Library is under serious threat, and public law libraries may cease to exist, despite a state statute mandating their existence. (Business and Professions §6340)

SERVICE AND SERVICES:

Normally the county law library operates the Martinez Branch 45 hours per week, and Richmond branch is open 40 hours per week. However, the courts were closed from March 16 through May 22 of this year. Because both the Martinez and Richmond branches are located in courthouses, the Law Library was closed for the 10-week period. The Law Library was allowed to reopen on May 26 with staff being allowed to return to work, but the public is not allowed into the building. Staff has been serving customers through curbside service, over the telephone and by email as much as possible. Curbside service may become untenable as the weather changes.

Law Library users generally fall into one of two distinct user groups: Legal professionals (the bar and the bench) whose background affords them a greater understanding of legal research materials, although they may require assistance and access to a variety of materials and services, and the general public, most of whom are severely lacking in an understanding of law itself and are usually unfamiliar with legal research materials. This latter group often requires extensive help from library staff.

- During Fiscal Year 2019-20, 35,817 people contacted the law library, either by telephone, email, mail or in person to access our services. Although this represents an overall 15% decrease over the previous year, the 10-week closure accounts for this decrease. The monthly averages for user contacts at the Law Library are 3,516 for Fiscal Year 2018-19 and 3,770 for Fiscal Year 2019-20, representing a 7% increase.
- An additional 4,473 people used the library remotely by visiting our website.
- Our figures show significantly greater use by the general public than other members of the community. For example, only 69 (5%) of the 1,335 of the emails and phone calls were from attorneys; the remaining 95% were from the general public.
- Seventy-seven percent of computer users in the library were members of the lay public, compared to 23% computer use by legal professionals; and 95% of the reference questions came from unrepresented people with little or no legal training, with only 5% from legal professionals.

- Only 3% of the cash transactions (payment for copies, forms, faxes, etc.) came from legal professionals during the past fiscal year; the remaining 97% were from the lay public.

MEETINGS AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES:

- A monthly board meeting was scheduled during each of the 12 months of the year, with 2 meetings cancelled due to lack of quorum, and 3 meetings cancelled due to the COVID-19 courthouse and Law Library 10-week closure. Seven meetings were held. The library has had a judicial vacancy on the Board of Trustees since the beginning of 2020. This makes achieving a quorum for monthly board meetings more challenging.
- Staff training was downsized again this year due to budget shortfalls and fiscal uncertainty. Improved funding will make it possible to resume training staff in needed areas. Staff does regularly take advantage of webinars and work well as a team to cross-train each other where applicable.

PUBLIC RELATIONS, MARKETING AND OUTREACH ACTIVITIES:

Outreach was affected by the 10-week closure, although some previous outreach was possible. Here are some highlights:

- The library planned to host a table at the Richmond Senior Health and Information Fair in May, however, the event was cancelled due to COVID-19.
- Library staff also participated in various outreach activities sponsored by the Contra Costa County Bar Association, including the annual Bridging the Gap program prior to the COVID-19 closure.

BUILDINGS AND EQUIPMENT:

The Contra Costa County Public Law Library currently serves patrons county-wide in two locations, all of which are housed inside courthouses:

- Martinez – The main library, conveniently located in the A.F. Bray (criminal court) building;
- Richmond – Serving west county from the second floor of the Richmond courthouse.

When the library is fully operational, public computers, photocopying, scanning and faxing services are available.

THE COLLECTION:

- The library holds more than 40,000 books.
- Collections are up to date and kept in good order and condition.
- Holdings include more than 100,000 non-book items (microforms and CD-ROMs).
- Subscriptions to online services include the following: CEB's Onlaw, Westlaw, Heinonline, and Commerce Clearinghouse Tax Service. Online subscriptions make it possible for staff and library users to access statutory and case law for all 50 states and Washington D.C., a large body of law review and journal articles, as well as other extensive content. These services are very popular with both user groups and are frequently requested.

- Collection development is an ongoing process for the library. This means that the library's collection is constantly scrutinized for changes that need to be made, with an eye toward serving the needs of our patrons in the most cost-effective manner possible.
- For several years, declining revenues have necessitated collection development aimed at identifying material that could be eliminated and replaced with a less expensive source. All library materials are evaluated when they come up for renewal or when updates are received. There are no exceptions to this. However, care is taken to avoid reductions which would result in a decreased level of service to our users, declining revenues force the library to cancel subscriptions wherever possible.

PERSONNEL:

- The main branch (Martinez) has staff permanently assigned to the location.
- The Richmond branch is staffed by a combination of extra help workers and permanent staff from the main branch who rotate through the schedule.
- Although the demand for services is rising, increasing staffing significantly has been difficult due to declining revenues.
- The staff of the Contra Costa County Public Law Library remains committed to serving all users in accordance with the library's high standard of excellence.

PROJECTS AND PLANS:

- Plans for the upcoming fiscal year will focus on the library's ability to continue to meet the research and information needs of its users within a difficult economic climate.
- Staff will work with the Board of Trustees to deliver the best possible service to our users while exercising practices designed to avoid the spread of the Corona Virus which has led to the COVID-19 pandemic. State and local guidelines and directives will be vital during the upcoming year.
- The practice of evaluating all updates and renewals of library materials will continue and staff will work closely with the board of trustees to ensure that a balance of materials is available to serve our diverse users.
- Outreach has always been important at the Law Library, but is uncertain at this time due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Law Library sponsored workshops and clinics such as Conservatorship, Court Accounting and Lawyer in the Library are currently on hold while staff works with appropriate professionals to develop alternate methods of providing these services and programs to our users, since in-person contact is not possible at this time.
- The same principle applies to all other services of the Law Library. The main focus for the next fiscal year will be developing and refining ways to serve our users within the health and safety limitations necessitated by the current viral pandemic.
- The Law Library will remain community-based, regardless of changes necessitated by economics and health and safety issues.

COMMENTS:

Although the Contra Costa County Public Law Library is operating in a time of many challenges, the staff and trustees remain committed to serving the people of Contra Costa County. We wish to thank our users for their patience and loyalty as we all work together to assist people in meeting their legal information needs.

A special thanks goes to the Board of Trustees of the Contra Costa County Public Law Library for its ongoing support, wisdom, and counsel.

Carey Rowan

Respectfully submitted

Carey Rowan, Library Director

Appendix A: Analysis of Fiscal Year End Financial Information, July 2019- June 2020

(Based on County General Ledger Closing dated 08/31/20 - Prepared by Arlene Mose on 09/24/20.

REVENUES	Account #	
Court filing fees & nontaxable	9681	\$ 741,693
Miscellaneous nontaxable revenue	9975	55,763
Pooled earnings	9975	23,733
TOTAL REVENUES		\$ 821,189
EXPENSES		
Permanent salaries	1011	229,719
Temporary salaries	1013	50,845
F.I.C.A.	1042	6,105
Retirement expenses	1044	81,404
Employee group insurance	1060	40,033
Retiree health insurance	1061	24,301
Unemployment insurance	1063	295
Workers' compensation insurance	1070	3,079
Office expenses/ Outreach/ Forms	2100	23,729
Postage	2103	119
Communications	2110	6,896
Telephone exchange service	2111	4,357
Minor computer equipment	2132	1,366
Food	2150	255
Memberships	2200	720
Rents and leases- Equipment	2250	9,910
Maintenance- Equipment	2270	1,868
Non-County Prof Specialized Svs	2310	21,518
Data processing services	2315	2,796
Electronic database services	2323	173,257
Information security charges	2326	129
GSD courier service	2331	1,343
Other telecom services	2335	
Insurance	2360	108
Adult materials: Library books	2361	11,177
Specialized printing	2473	205,936
		14,753
TOTAL EXPENSES		\$ 915,568

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY PUBLIC LAW LIBRARY TRUST FUND BALANCE - SUMMARY	
Trust fund balance at beginning of FY 2019/20	\$1,442,527
Total revenues - FY 2019/20	821,189
Total expenses - FY 2019/20	(915,568)
Trust fund balance at close of FY 2019/20	\$1,348,148

Appendix B: STATISTICAL AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS, JULY 2019 – JUNE 2020

	MARTINEZ		RICHMOND		TOTAL	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
NUMBER OF WEBSITE VISITS	-	-	-	-	4,473	100%
NUMBER OF WEBPAGES VISITED	-	-	-	-	11,692	100%
NUMBER OF VISITS (GATE COUNT)	-	-	-	-	34,482	100%
MATERIALS / RESOURCES USED						
BOOKS— LEG. PROFESSIONALS	1,255	76%	386	24%	1,641	100%
BOOKS—GENERAL PUBLIC	1,061	75%	354	25%	1,415	100%
BOOKS—TOTAL	2,316	76%	740	24%	3,056	100%
CD-ROMS— LEG. PROFESSIONALS	8	100%	0	100%	8	100%
CD-ROMS— GENERAL PUBLIC	0	0	0	0	0	100%
CD-ROMS--TOTAL	8	100%	0	100%	8	100%
COPIER USE— LEGAL PROFESSIONALS	155	73%	57	27%	212	100%
COPIER USE—GENERAL PUBLIC	585	78%	165	22%	750	100%
COPIER USE--TOTAL	740	77%	222	23%	962	100%
COMPUTER USE— LEGAL PROFESSIONALS	548	78%	116	17%	664	100%
COMPUTER USE—GENERAL PUBLIC	1,655	77%	507	23%	2,162	100%
COMPUTER USE—TOTAL	2,203	78%	623	22%	2,826	100%
SERVICES RENDERED						
REFERENCE/RESEARCH— LEGAL PROFESSIONALS	17	81%	4	19%	21	100%
REFERENCE/RESEARCH—GENERAL PUBLIC	193	50%	190	50%	383	100%
REFERENCE/RESEARCH—TOTAL	210	52%	194	48%	404	100%
QUICK ASSISTANCE— LEGAL PROFESSIONALS	722	95%	40	5%	762	100%
QUICK ASSISTANCE— GENERAL PUBLIC	2,090	80%	522	20%	2,612	100%
QUICK ASSISTANCE—TOTAL	2,812	83%	562	17%	3,374	100%
HELP BY PHONE/EMAIL—LEGAL PROFESSIONALS	58	84%	11	16%	69	100%
HELP BY PHONE/EMAIL—GENERAL PUBLIC	1,112	88%	154	12%	1,266	100%
HELP BY PHONE/EMAIL—TOTAL	1,170	88%	165	12%	1,335	100%
HELP WITH FAX— LEGAL PROFESSIONALS	7	100%	0	0	7	100%
HELP WITH FAX— GENERAL PUBLIC	17	74%	6	26%	23	100%
HELP WITH FAX— TOTAL	24	80%	6	20%	30	100%
CASH TRANSACTIONS— LEGAL PROFESSIONALS	167	68%	79	32%	246	100%
CASH TRANSACTIONS—GENERAL PUBLIC	6,546	94%	436	6%	6,982	100%
CASH TRANSACTIONS—TOTAL	6,713	93%	515	7%	7,228	100%
WORKSHOPS & CLINICS						
CIVIL PRO PER	35	100%	-	-	35	100%
CONSERVATORSHIP – REQUIRED	111	100%	-	-	111	100%
CONSERVATORSHIP - OPTIONAL	34	100%	-	-	34	100%
GUARDIANSHIP	20	100%	-	-	20	100%
LAWYER IN THE LIBRARY	173	61%	112	39%	285	100%
SMALL CLAIMS	49	100%	-	-	49	100%