

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY PUBLIC LAW LIBRARY



ANNUAL REPORT

July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024

1026 Escobar Street
Martinez, CA 94553

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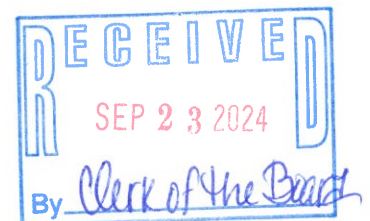


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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR – By Carey Rowan

Welcome ! On behalf of the Board of Trustees and staff of Contra Costa County Public Law Library, and in fulfillment of the requirement of Business and Professions Code §6349, it is my pleasure to present the 2023-24 Annual Report.

The fiscal year ending June 30, 2024 proved to be one of the most exciting and challenging fiscal years in the history of our law library. After 2 years of intensive planning, the new county building on Escobar Street in downtown Martinez, including space for the main branch of the county law library, was completed. The long-awaited process of moving the law library from its previous location inside the A.F. Bray Courthouse, which housed the library for the last 3 decades, began in the spring of 2024.

Moving a library is not like any other type of move, and this was truly an adventure. We were only closed to the public for 2 weeks, during which time we continued to field reference questions by phone and email, whenever possible. The bulk of the relocation process was completed by the end of the fiscal year. We are especially proud to be housed in a building that was the first public structure in the world to achieve the zero-waste-focused TRUE Gold certification for construction.

It is heartwarming to hear the positive feedback about the new library from our patrons, and staff is looking forward to serving our patrons in a modern, clean, comfortable building for many years to come.

The Board of Trustees and staff of the Contra Costa County Public Law Library wish to take this opportunity to thank the Board of Supervisors for supporting the law library, recognizing the importance of the work we do, and showing this by including us in the new building project. On behalf of our users, we are very grateful!

Let's get started as we take a look at staffing and governance or who we are, what we do, how we do it, finances, where we have been and where we are going. But first, on a more personal note, our library lost one of its own this year. Please see page 10, In Memoriam: A Tribute to Hal Aigner. This report is dedicated to Hal's memory.

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.

VISION

The vision of the Contra Costa Public Law Library is to be a significant legal information resource committed to excellent service. The law library strives to provide an environment that is conducive to learning and research.

WHAT WE DO

The law library provides access to legal information, court forms, referrals to other services and agencies, as well as offering workshops and clinics. There are computers for patrons to use for legal research, online workshops and completing court forms.

Library patrons are served in person at the Reference and Information Desk at the front of the library, but remote services are also available. We are available by phone and through a dedicated reference email address:

Reference.questionsCCCPPLLIB@gmail.com.

Law library staff receive many inquiries about Conservatorships, and in response to this, we maintain a four-page Q&A section on our website. Many patrons approach the library needing forms or forms packets, but often people are bewildered as to how to complete the forms. The library has samples of many of the most common forms which patrons can use to help them understand the complexities of the paperwork and complete it correctly.

We offer California-specific material on almost all areas of law, as well as federal statutes and caselaw. Because the majority of our users are self-represented litigants, our EBSCO program offering Nolo Press books online, which can be accessed remotely, is one of our most popular services.

The main branch of the law library has seven public service computers which can be used for research, or completing workshops, or preparing court paperwork.

Our Lawyer in the Library clinic, now in its 14th year, remains extremely popular with self-represented individuals. Lawyer in the Library provides a free legal consultation to unrepresented persons with a legal problem or question who need information, direction, or advice from an experienced attorney. Fifteen clinics were held during Fiscal Year 2023-24.

The Court Accounting workshops offered by Zoom is another popular program available to individuals needing to submit an accounting to the court. Petitioners in decedent estate cases and those who are required by statute to submit a court reporting in conjunction with a Conservatorship appointment frequently request a space in the class. Five classes were held during the fiscal year.

Law library staff members are often asked what types of questions our patrons ask when visiting, emailing or calling the library. Here are some examples of the types of inquiries we routinely receive:

Adoption	Financial support
Animal Rights	Fraud
Appeals	Guardianship
Bankruptcy	Identity theft
Conservatorship	Immigration
Credit card lawsuit	Mechanics Lien
Custody	Name Change
Cyberbullying	Neighbor law
Decedent estate	Personal Injury
Divorce	Police Misconduct
Elder Abuse	Power of Attorney
Employment discrimination	Restraining order
Eviction	Small Claims
Expungements	Trusts

FUNDING

Funding for county law libraries in California has diminished by 40% since 2008 when SB 1407 went into effect, making it impossible for law libraries to increase their portion of civil filing fees, which accounts for at least 90% of their funding base. 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. It is important to note that in the decade and a half since funding for county law libraries was frozen, the figures for the Contra Costa County Public Law Library show an increase in demand for services in excess of tenfold. This means that for every person who sought help at the law library in 2008, there are ten or eleven people seeking services in our library now.

Unlike general public libraries, such as those under the jurisdiction of counties or cities, public law libraries receive no funding from the tax base. During the past six years, the Council of California County Law Librarians has successfully lobbied state elected officials and has succeeded in obtaining bail-out funds for law libraries on 3 different occasions. Although these cash awards have helped law libraries, they are not permanent solutions. Noteworthy is the fact that in 2017, the Contra Costa County Public Law Library was forced to close its east county branch due to an inability to fund it.

The staff of the Contra Costa County Public Law Library has responded to the financial crisis by instituting a number of measures. Aside from shuttering our Pittsburg branch in east county, staff reduced the size of the collection by ceasing more than \$100,000 worth of materials. All law library materials are evaluated as they come up for renewal, meaning the collection is under constant scrutiny. At one time, the library had a robust training program where employees could attend workshops and seminars. This has been eliminated with staff only accessing workshops which are offered at no cost and can be done remotely. Memberships, such as American Association of Law Libraries and Northern California Association of Law Libraries, were stopped several years ago, and staff no longer attends professional conferences.

The current funding system for county law libraries is archaic and no longer works in today's world where, for example, in Contra Costa County, during Fiscal Year 2023-24, ninety-seven percent of the reference questions fielded by law library staff were from non-attorneys who are representing themselves. Ninety-seven percent of the emailed reference questions were from the general public, and ninety-nine percent of the people who called the library with reference questions were self-represented.

Creating sustainable funding for California's county law libraries is a critical goal for the future.

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY PUBLIC LA LIBRARY: FUNDING AND REVENUE FACTS

Business & Professions Code §6340 mandates that each county have a law library. The current method of funding law libraries is outdated and unsustainable. It needs to be replaced by a line item in the state budget creating stable funding for this valuable resource which has served Californians for more than 100 years.

Per Business & Professions Code §6321 et seq., the funding source for California's county law libraries is a small portion of civil court filing fees. No revenue is generated from services that do not involve a court filing, such as estate planning or starting a business.

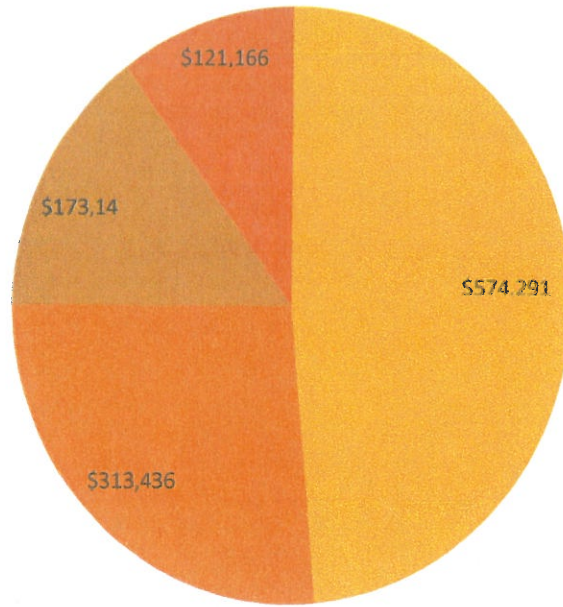
More than 90% of revenues for county law libraries in California are derived from civil filing fees. In Contra Costa County, 90% of law library funding is from filing fees.

SB 1407 (2008) established a moratorium on California's law libraries ability to increase their portion of civil filing fees. This resulted in an ongoing economic crisis for county law libraries statewide.

BALANCE SHEET AS OF JUNE 30, 2024

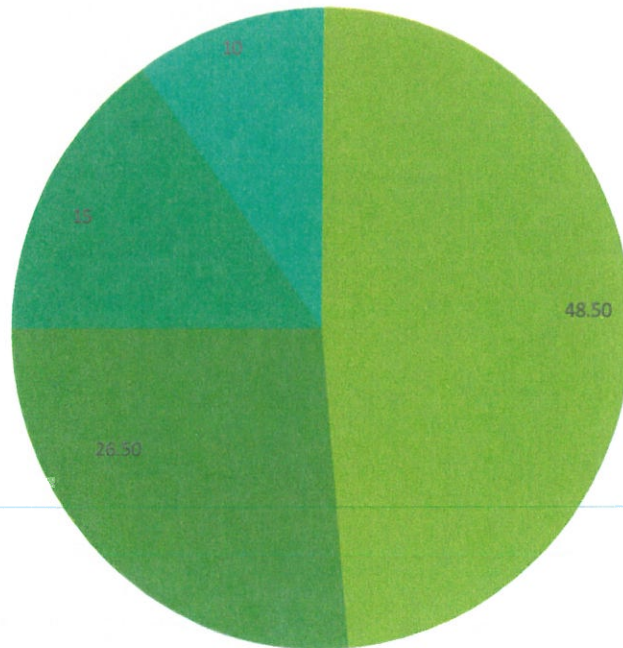
	Accounts	
<u>ASSETS</u>		
Cash and cash equivalents	0010, 0020	\$1,954,854
Accounts receivable	0100	\$95,505
Due from other funds	0180	\$9,482
Total Assets		\$2,059,841
<u>LIABILITIES</u>		
Accounts payable	0500, 0510	\$88,308
Due to other funds	0540	\$3,993
Total liabilities		\$92,301
<u>FUND BALANCE</u>		
Unassigned		\$1,967,540
Total fund balance		\$1,967,540
Total liabilities and fund balance		\$2,059,841
<u>REVENUES</u>		
Charges for services – court filing fees	9600	\$968,836
Revenue from fax, copies, donations and state supplemental funds	9800	\$122,319
Receipts	0800	\$87,966
Total revenues		\$1,179,121
<u>EXPENDITURES</u>		
Salaries and benefits	1000	\$574,291
Services and supplies	2000	\$605,718
Miscellaneous	3000	\$2,036
Total expenditures		\$1,182,045
<u>NET CHANGE IN FUND BALANCE</u>		(\$2,924)
Beginning of Fiscal Year	0740	\$1,970,464
End of Fiscal Year	0740	\$1,967,540

Expenses FY 23-24 Total = \$1,182,042



■ Personnel ■ Electronic ■ Print ■ Other services & supplies

Expenses - Percentage Breakdown



■ Personnel expenses ■ Electronic databases ■ Print material ■ Other services & supplies

BOARD OF TRUSTEES:

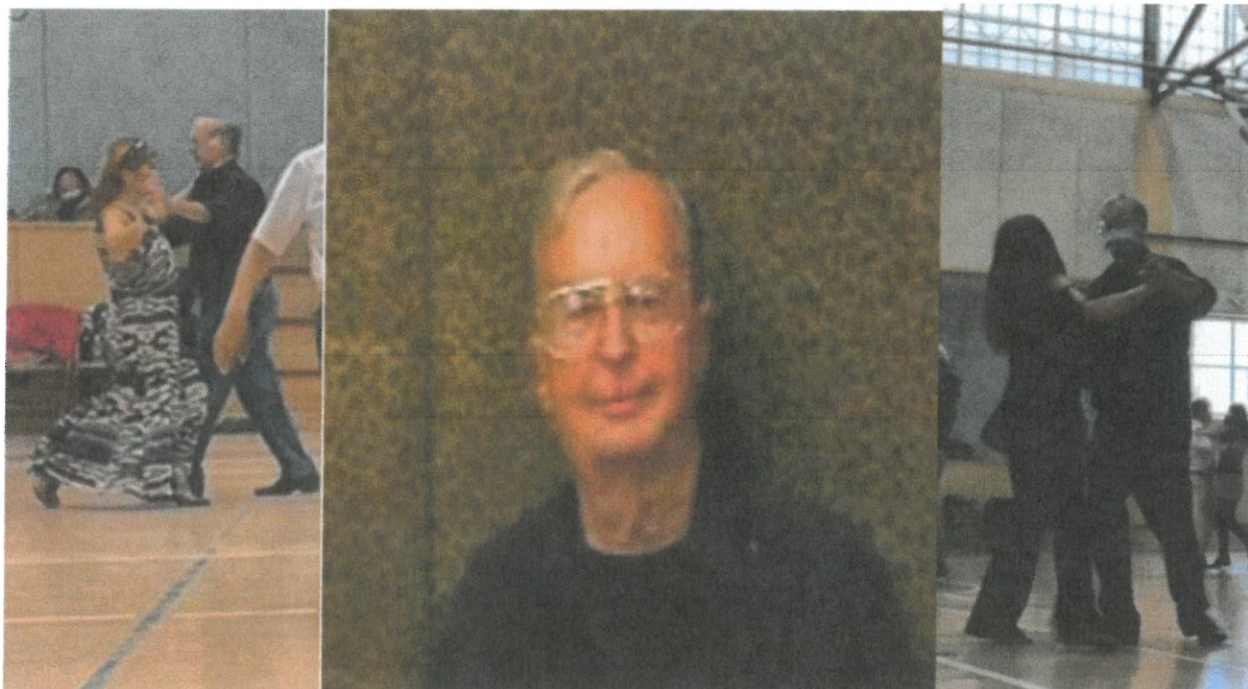
“There is in each county of this State a board of law library trustees, which governs the law library established for the county under the provisions of this chapter.” – Business & Professions Code §6300

CONRA COSTA COUNTY PUBLIC LAW LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES	
	Hon. Terri Mockler, President, Board of Trustees
Hon. Virginia George, Vice-President	Nolan Armstrong, Esq., Secretary
Hon. Wendy Coats, Trustee	Joshua Klein, Esq., Trustee
Hon. John Devine, Trustee	Hon. Melissa O’Connell, Trustee

LIBRARY STAFF:

CONRA COSTA COUNTY PUBLIC LAW LIBRARY STAFF	
Carey Rowan, Full-time, Library Director and Secretary to the Board	Denise Mendoza, Full-time, Administrative Assistant, Office Manager, and Collection Development
Shannon Benson, Full-time, Library Assistant, Tech. Services, Reference and Collection Development	Daniel Randleman, Full-time, Reference
Deanna Ray, Full-time, Reference	Taeho Chung, Part-time, Extra Help, Reference
Vacant, Part-time, Extra Help, Reference	

In Memory Of Henry "Hal" Joseph Aigner 1945-2024



Hal was the Director of the Marin County Law Library for many years. After retiring from that position, he joined the Reference staff of the Contra Costa County Public Law Library, working part-time at both our main branch in Martinez, and the two satellite branches, Pittsburg (now closed), and Richmond. He was a vital presence in staffing the David del Simone Memorial Law Library in Richmond and was instrumental in working with the Lawyer in the Library program. Library users often asked for him specifically as they knew him to be very knowledgeable and helpful.

Hal was known for his intelligence and dedication to his work, but he had many interests outside of work. He played guitar, and was a published author, with several books to his credit. He had recently completed an extensive legal treatise on fiduciary responsibilities. A lover of the arts, Hal was involved with the bay area Red Bean Cantonese Opera for many years and was an avid ballroom dancer at the San Francisco Richmond Recreation Center. His friends, colleagues, and co-workers will miss him very much, as will the many library patrons he assisted over the years.

While his death in May of 2024 shocked and saddened all who knew him, he will be remembered for his life of service to others, and his legacy of hope.

LOOKING AHEAD

Plans for the 2024-25 Fiscal Year will focus on the following areas:

- Collection development and collection management based on balancing the needs of library users within budget parameters;
- Quarterly budget reviews in public, noticed meetings;
- Continuation of programs such as Lawyer in the Library, Court Accounting workshops, and Housing Clinics;
- Collaboration with the Contra Costa County Bar Association to reinvent the David del Simone Memorial Law Library into a space whose functions are more relevant to the needs of today's community;
- Provide ongoing excellent service to all who seek assistance at the Contra Costa County Public Law Library.