



San Francisco Law Library  
Marcia R. Bell, Director  
marcia.bell@sfgov.org

1145 Market St. 4<sup>th</sup> Fl. □ San Francisco, CA 94103  
Direct (415) 554-1792 □ <http://www.sflawlibrary.com>

## **FY 2021 – 2022 Budget Hearing Presentation**

### About the SF Law Library

- Pursuant to state law, the San Francisco Law Library was founded in 1870 and is the model upon which all other California County Law Libraries are based. It is an autonomous agency governed by a board of trustees comprised of San Francisco attorneys, and the Presiding Judge and members of the Appellate Department of the San Francisco Superior Court. The board of trustees oversees library operations, finances, and governance, requiring impeccable integrity of the library and staff. The law library provides free services to all San Franciscans.

### Funding

- The enabling legislation and subsequent San Francisco Charters require that the City and County of San Francisco provide library quarters, utilities, funding for three management positions, and a small amount for miscellaneous items. All normal operating expenses including legal materials and updates in electronic or print formats, legal databases, staff salaries & benefits, equipment, furnishings, and all other items necessary for a law library to function are not funded by CCSF but by a small portion of civil court filing fees. Unfortunately, the library's filing fee income reflects a statewide trend and has steadily declined since 2008, with FY 2020-21 recording the lowest fee income ever, which was 32% lower than last year's fee income.
- The law library's proposed FY 2021-22 Budget has no significant changes, no new positions, or programs, as has been the case for many, many years.

### Impacts of COVID & Filing Fee Reductions on Library Services

2020 marked the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the library's mission to provide and promote access to justice in San Francisco. We planned to celebrate throughout 2020, but instead spent 2020 reimagining our services, collections, and what access to justice looks like in a pandemic. As it turns out, we've found that our services remain in high demand and will become more crucial as people try to work on legal issues stemming from COVID.

- COVID and budget reductions due to the significant filing fee income decline, forced the library to lay-off three employees and work with a bare minimum staffing level to provide remote services during COVID. The library also did not fill a CCSF funded management position in order to provide budget relief in the last budget cycle.
- The library had to cancel many legal subscriptions to reduce costs, but offered substantial enhanced legal information services online, including:
  - ❖ Access to extensive legal databases not normally permitted by legal publishers to be made available off-site
  - ❖ Sophisticated professional librarian reference services
  - ❖ COVID legal information guides
  - ❖ Scanned document deliveries, and

- ❖ Frequent free live legal seminars, such as:
  - *Dealing with COVID Rent Debt*,
  - *Understanding Legislation*
  - *Introduction to Westlaw*
  - *Public Ways to Locate the Law & Understand It*,
  - *Effective Communication and Tools for Negotiating Rent during COVID*.

(For example, see [Law Library Resources Available from Home COVID & Library Resources Guide](#); [Quick Guide on Dealing with Rent Debt](#); [Equity & Diversity Guides](#), [Contract Issues During Covid](#); [Homeschooling Resources](#); and [Holographic Wills](#) at [sflawlibrary@sfgov.org](mailto:sflawlibrary@sfgov.org).)

#### Inequities & Gaps Due to the Pandemic

- People without access to computers or technology skills were likely impacted by the shift to remote electronic services during COVID
- Our staff was reduced but had to handle all the responsibilities of demanding online reference services, and to fill in for laid-off staff
- Our budget was severely impacted by court closures and resulting filing fee reductions, necessitating a re-evaluation of our print and electronic resources to tighten up our offerings while still providing in depth legal research tools and new services. We were able to negotiate some temporary arrangements with several legal database publishers to provide electronic resources for items not accessible during the closure of the law library

#### Law Library Support for Community Groups

- The law library offers legal resources for small businesses & provides seminars on topics pertinent to their interests
- The law library provides solo practitioners and small firms with legal resources they otherwise cannot afford or access so that they may conduct their businesses to provide low-cost and pro bono services to people in need
- The law library continually works to expand its outreach to community-based needs by collaborating and cooperating with our partners in the SF Superior Court, legal services, the SF Bar Association, city departments (e.g., the public library, SF Jail research team, City Attorney's office, the Ethics Commission, and others)
- The library partners with Bay Area Legal Aid to provide a consumer legal clinic in the library, and
- The law library works as a test site for the California Judicial Council's self-help guide update project as it works to revise and create easily understandable legal information resources for the public
- Superior Court judges have identified the need for citizens to have basic civic courses in order to understand the law and government, and for unrepresented litigants to come to court better prepared to participate in the court processes, and the law library offers resources for non-lawyers and reference assistance to help them understand and prepare for court.

#### Resources for SF Supervisors

- The law library created a wide variety of resources and materials to assist Supervisors and all local lawmakers and their staff to respond to the needs of their constituents and the people of San Francisco
- Our collection includes current and historical legislative and topical material relevant for researching and drafting legislation, including treatises on statutory construction and a national survey of state laws, which is an essential comparative tool for legislation.
- Supervisors and all City departments and employees are invited to join the library's [LexisNexis Digital Library](#), which provides free, remote, personal access to our large collection of LexisNexis e-books including a wide range of California and general legal topics. One may access essential e-books

The SFLL LexisNexis Digital Library provides free, remote access to our collection of LexisNexis e-books, including a wide range of California and general legal topics. One may access essential e-books—online or offline—wherever you are: in the courtroom, in the office, working from home, or anywhere with limited internet connectivity. Please contact the law library for information about enrolling in this free program.

Future Planning, Goals & Impacts

- The law library made many adjustments to provide services during the pandemic and will continue to create ways it can expand outreach to larger and larger sectors of the community
- The law library is limited by the lack of funding for sufficient staffing, materials updates, and the high cost of online legal database resources. There is no way to determine when or whether the filing fee decline will abate, level out or improve. The library must continue to develop resources in-house that can serve San Franciscans with the information they need but this will be a big challenge
- The library appreciates support from other departments as well as the larger community to help spread the word about the library's services and for collaborating with other entities for the benefit of its citizens
- The law library and its patrons have benefited greatly by the contributions of legal experts and some departments to collaborate with the law library to develop regular legal programs and seminars
- The library sends out a [Newsletter](#) with information about library services, programs, and legal resources every month which go to a wide sector of San Franciscans. As a law library, we have always promoted access to justice and transparency

Respectfully submitted,

Marcia R. Bell, Director  
San Francisco Law Library

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