

Law Library Service to Prisoners (LLSP) Annual Report for 2021

General Information

Under an Inter-Agency Agreement between the Minnesota Department of Corrections (MNDOC) and the Minnesota State Law Library (MSLL), the Law Library Service to Prisoners (LLSP) program provides law library service to people incarcerated in a MNDOC facility or otherwise under MNDOC jurisdiction.

Legal information requests are accepted by "kite," a request form available to Incarcerated Persons (IPs) at their facility. In addition, they may call or write to us. While there is no cost to the patron, we limit our responses to 80 pages, or 8 items, per 2-week period. IPs with pending court actions are given priority and their requests are answered weekly until their pending action is resolved.

LLSP librarians also work with library staff at each facility to ensure that a core collection of legal research materials is available at the facility.

2021, A Year of Change

This has been a year of change for the Law Library Service to Prisoners Program (LLSP). Through this second year of the pandemic, LLSP has continued to mail responses to prisons every two weeks, but we have not visited a single facility. We continue to receive requests by kite, by telephone, and occasionally by letter. We have started to explore the use of Zoom to conduct virtual visits at a few facilities and plan to expand this service to additional facilities in 2022.

Our Staff

In August we said farewell to long-term LLSP Librarian Susan Trombley, who has moved on to work at a local law firm. In September, we welcomed Allyson Osocki as a new part-time librarian. Ally is diligently working on fulfilling kites, already answering 1,425 questions. When she has time, she is also working on a digitization project and exploring better ways to manage our statistics. We are delighted to have Ally on our team.

Jean Anderson celebrated her twelfth anniversary with LLSP and continues to manage the administrative tasks of the department and answered 5,105 questions.

Stephanie Thorson celebrated her twenty-first year with LLSP and is not slowing down at all. She answered 9,413 questions and carried much of the load during our transition time.

In Their Own Words

I asked all three librarians to sum up the year in a few words. Here is what they provided:

- **Jean** – “2021 was in a couple of words, ‘Tidal wave,’ or if you want one word, ‘Tsunami.’ Seriously, my year in LLSP was all about change, adjustment, accommodation, and survival.

Changes in how the program is providing service (pilot program for Virtual Visits). Adjusting to the loss of a long-term colleague who moved on. Adjusting to a new hire several generations younger (it is a different thought process between generations, it is also kind of fun). Accommodation for weekly, if not daily, MNDOC lockdowns due to COVID outbreaks that resulted in an increased workload for our program. Finally, survival through it all, which would not have been possible without the grit and determination of my colleague Stephanie Thorson.”

- **Stephanie** – “Although I do love my job, I can honestly say that 2021 was the hardest year of my over 20 years working at Law Library Service to Prisoners. I do realize that the entire world had a difficult year. I feel a sense of accomplishment with all the changes, troubles, and disruptions we were still able to make every deadline.”
- **Ally** -- “I started at LLSP in September of 2021. While this position has been a steep learning curve, especially with COVID-19 and staff absences, I have greatly enjoyed my time in this position. From getting to work with IPs to learning more about the legal system, LLSP has been an incredible experience. I am so excited to continue growing and working in this program.”

Virtual Visits Pilot Project

After much planning and a few failed attempts, we are now conducting virtual visits with our IPs using Zoom. Jean Anderson took the lead on this project during the development stage, beginning in June. She spent many hours meeting with MNDOC staff and testing connections. When Ally joined us in September, she expressed interest in this project and proved to have the comfort with technology and skills we needed. At the time of this report, we have conducted three virtual visits in which five IPs met with a librarian. Ally reports:

The project is still in the early phases and factors like technology issues, power outages, and facility lockdowns have all affected our visits. Despite all the complications, the IPs that I have been able to meet with have all been extremely thankful and it's a lot easier to answer their questions if I can have a conversation with them. Michael Schneider, the prison librarian at Lino Lakes, has been incredibly helpful and flexible during this process. We are going to continue to have virtual visits once a month and we are hoping that as we continue, we will be able to introduce the program to more facilities and more IPs.

While the pandemic inspired this project, we can see that virtual visits are a great option for meeting with IPs and we plan to continue them even when life returns to “normal,” whatever and whenever that may be.

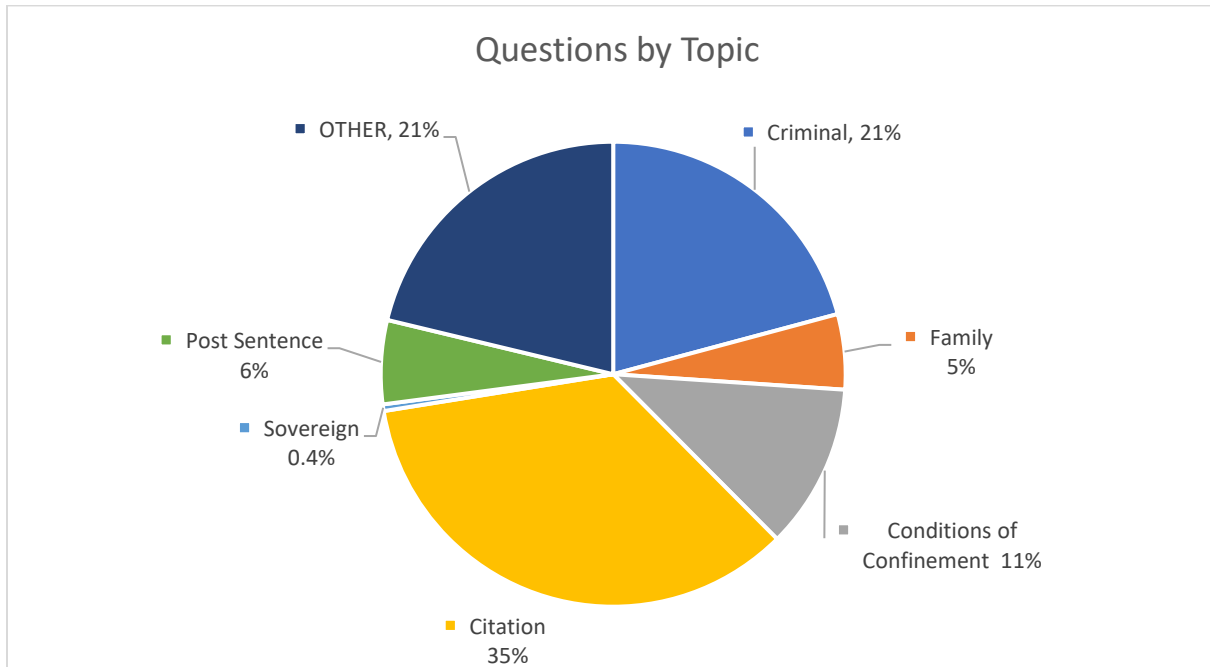
Receiving Kites by Email

We continue to receive kites by email, and I think it is safe to say that we can't imagine doing it any other way now. This process, in which MNDOC librarians receive kites from the IPs at their facility and send a scanned copy to us via email, was started in 2020. As of now, we are still printing the kites to work on them, but we are experimenting with ways that we can remove this step.

Requests by the Numbers

We answered a total of 20,047 questions from 2,071 IPs in 2021. In response to the questions, we sent 31,193 items on a range of topics. We answered 850 phone calls 2021, which is a 20% increase from 2020.

The chart below shows a breakdown of requests by topic.

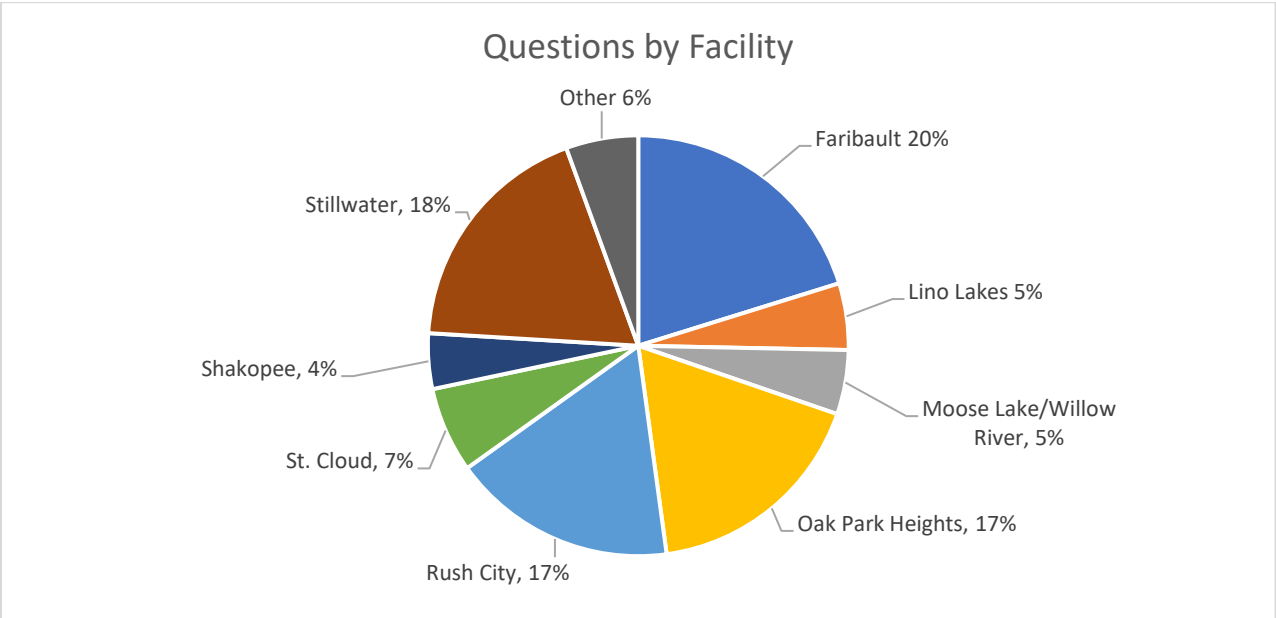
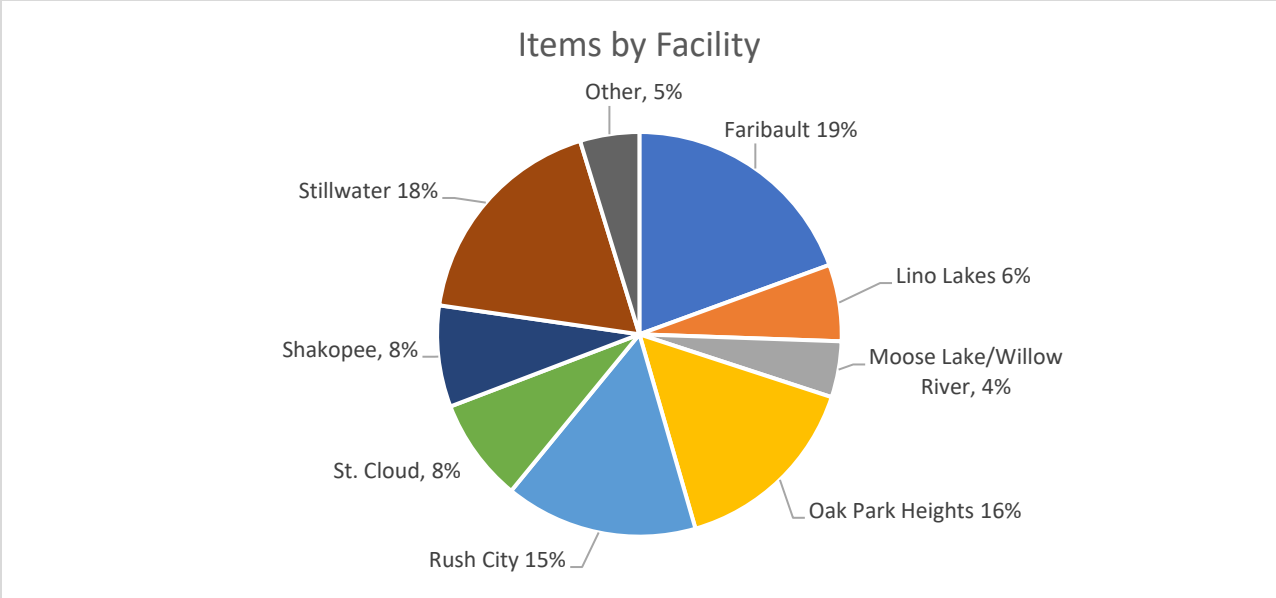


It is not surprising to see that a majority of the questions are “Citation” which means that the patron provided a citation to a case, a law review articles, or a statute from another state. Many of our IPs are skilled researchers and know exactly what to ask for.

It is also not surprising that we receive a high number of questions related to criminal law, as our IPs are frequently working on their own appeals.

We started recording the topic of our questions in 2019 and we are working to refine our approach. As with all aspects of this report, we appreciate any feedback from stakeholders about the data that they might like to see reported. This section is a response to a request from our prison librarians who expressed an interest in seeing how many questions we received that are not related to criminal law or conditions of confinement. We continue to have many requests for materials related to family law and we continue to look for ways to break down the “Other” category in a meaningful way. Included in the “Other” category are requests for materials on civil topics other than family law or 1983 actions. It also includes requests for contact information of government agencies and requests for power of attorney forms or information.

As in previous reports, we are also providing statistics related to the facilities we serve. The top three facilities remain consistent, but this year Faribault led with 6,059 items sent to fulfill 4,050 questions. This is change from previous years when Stillwater had the most requests.



Looking ahead

As we look to the future, we anticipate increasing the use of technology to better serve our patrons. As mentioned above, we are working to digitize frequently used print materials to decrease the time it takes to fulfill requests and exploring methods for collecting statistics and managing mailings to increase overall efficiency.

We also anticipate additional staff turnover and will be working on succession planning.