

Law Library Service to Prisoners (LLSP) Annual Report for 2022

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 IP, 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.

Our Staff

On July 20, 2022, we welcomed Valerie Salazar as a new part-time librarian. Valerie is completing her MLIS and will be receiving her degree in May 2023. Along with answering kites, Valerie has taken on administrative tasks for the department. She is already proving to be a very valued member of our team. Hiring Valerie was predicated on the retirement of Jean Anderson who had been with LLSP for over twelve years.

Stephanie Thorson celebrated her twenty-second year with LLSP and announced in December that she would retire on January 20, 2023. As I draft this report, I am aware that LLSP has experienced a complete turnover of staff since 2021. Allyson Ososki, who joined our team in July of 2021 is now our longest-term employee and is proving to be very well-suited to the job. She and Valerie are strategizing on how best to manage kites, as you will see below, and are very open to trying new approaches.

Virtual Visits Pilot Project

We are currently offering monthly video visits at Shakopee, Faribault, Lino Lakes, Saint Cloud, and Stillwater. We hope to add Moose Lake, Oak Park Heights, and Rush City within the next year.

We started virtual visits with IPs during the pandemic because we were unable to physically visit the facilities, as we have in the past. This approach has proven successful in providing IPs with an opportunity to speak with a librarian about the legal information they want, and the librarian is able to ask clarifying questions. The visits are five to ten minutes in duration and the feedback from the facility librarians and the IPs has been very positive.

Our original plan was to launch monthly video visits at all eight facilities by the end of this fiscal year. However, due to administrative decisions and information technology requirements, we only managed to do so at five of the eight facilities. We continue to work with the remaining three facilities with the goal of offering video visits at all facilities we serve.

At the time of this report, we have no plans to return to the practice of visiting facilities in person.

Steps to reduce printing

We started the approach of receiving kites by email in 2020. This process, in which MNDOC librarians receive kites from the IPs at their facility and send a scanned copy to us via email, has proven successful. Prior to this year, LLSP librarians were printing the kites to work on them. This year, we are happy to report that we are no longer printing the kites and are working from the scan. Given the number of kites we process, this is a significant reduction in paper consumption.

Requests by the Numbers

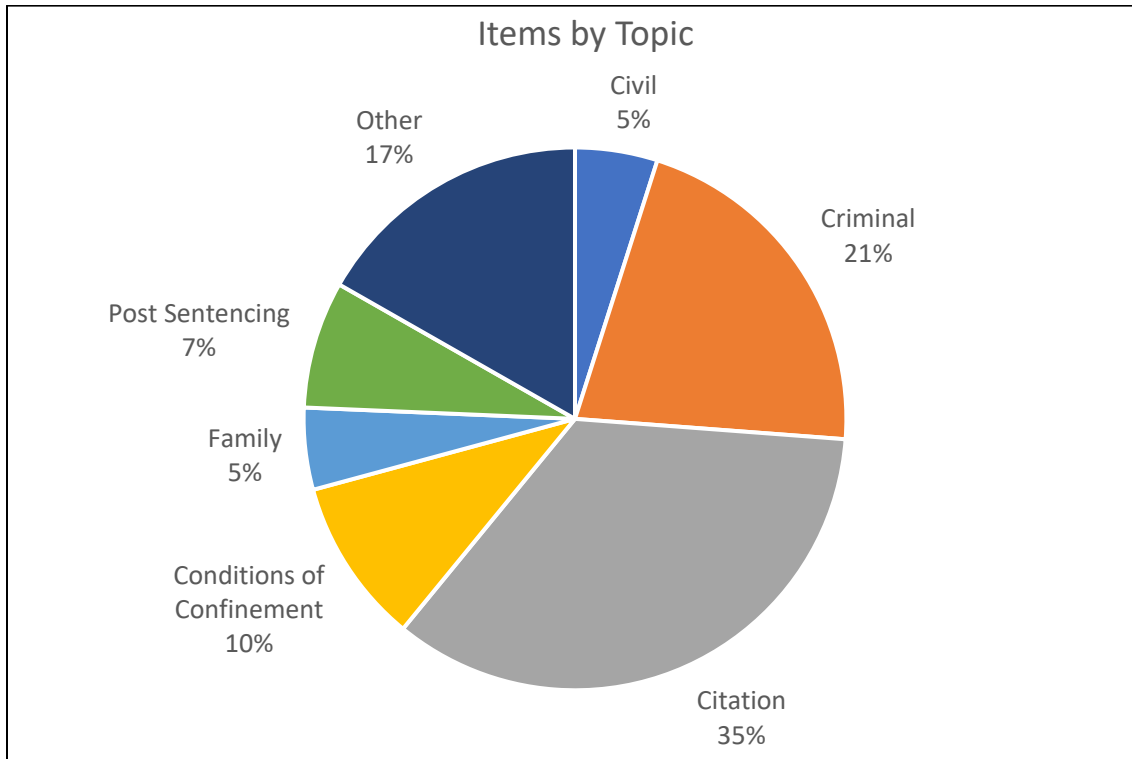
- 2022 Statistics 7,511 DOC inmates (as of 01/01/2022)
- 7,833 DOC inmates (as of 07/01/2022)
- 17,792 Questions answered
- 731 Phone calls (20% increase from 2020)
- 155 Video visits
- 23,577 Items sent
- 2,129 Individual inmates assisted

We answered a total of 17,792 questions from 2,129 IPs in 2022. In response to the questions, we sent 23,577 items on a range of topics. We also answered 731 phone calls and conducted 155 video visits.

We made a significant change this year in how we count the items we send. Previously, when sending a Minnesota Judicial Branch packet of forms, we counted each form within the packet as one item. We are now counting the packet as one item, which we determined to be more accurate and efficient. However, in looking at the number of items sent, we can see the impact of this decision. For context, a petition for divorce with children would have been counted as twenty-five items prior to this change. It is now counted as one. Similarly, a criminal appeal packet was previous counted as eight items and now is counted as one. Despite seeing a drop in

our statistics, we plan to maintain this new approach as it provides a more accurate reflection of the information provided to IPs.

The chart below shows a breakdown of items we sent by topic.

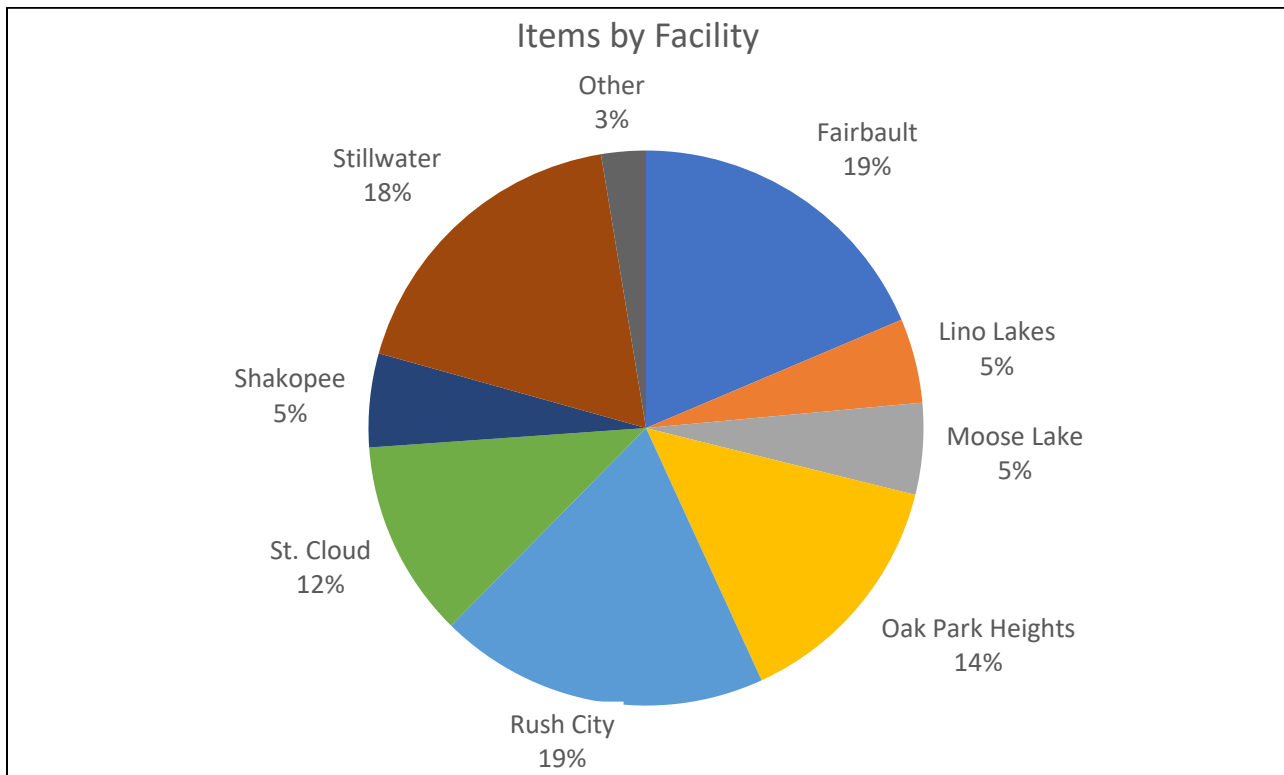


It is not surprising to see that most of the questions are "Citation" which means that the patron provided a citation to a case, a law review article, or a statute. Many of our IPs are skilled researchers and know exactly what to ask for.

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 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 topics such as immigration, sovereignty, and requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) or the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act.

As in previous reports, we are also providing statistics related to the facilities we serve. The top three facilities remain consistent, but this year Rush City led with 4,535 items sent. This is change from previous years when Faribault or Stillwater had the most requests.



Looking ahead

As we look to the future, we anticipate more change as our new librarians, including a new part-time librarian to be hired in 2023, bring forward their innovative ideas. We will be launching a new approach to how we gather statistics in 2023 and look forward to possibly having additional data to report next year. We also look forward increasing our connections with the facility librarians through regular meetings where we can share information and generate idea.